



TURKISH FOUNDING FATHERS OF UNITED EUROPE

KAYHAN KARACA



Published by Grand National Assembly of Türkiye

TBMM Basımevi, Ankara

www.tbmm.gov.tr

Graphic Design: Fatma YILMAZ

Photos: Council of Europe and Grand National Assembly of Türkiye archives

Copyright © 2025 by Grand National Assembly of Türkiye

ISBN: 978-625-6871-26-7

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher and the author

Printed in Türkiye

September 2025

First Edition

*Special thanks to the Council of Europe Archives
and Radio and TV Studios.*

Contents

Foreword by Numan Kurtulmuş	XV
Foreword by Theodoros Rousopoulos	XIX
. Preface	XXI
. The roots of the Council of Europe	1
. At the beginning: shaping Europe	11
. European identity	23
. The birth of the European Convention on Human Rights	31
. The Schuman Plan and Turkish parliamentarians.....	43
. European defence.....	57
. Cold War analysis	71
. Türkiye's support for Germany's admission to the Council of Europe	83
. Türkiye: creator of a Europe without borders	93
. European refugees	109
. Greek-Turkish nostalgic friendship at the Council of Europe.....	119
. Türkiye's contribution to foreign language teaching in Europe.....	129
. Europe's first rapporteur on freedom of expression was a Turkish politician	135
. The Parliamentary Assembly and the archaeological heritage of Istanbul	141
. Democratic disruptions: coups and Turkish-European relations	149
27 May 1960: the first wound in the Parliamentary Assembly	150
12 March 1971: Türkiye's image is changing	162
12 September 1980: breaking point.....	181
. Conclusion	209
. Bibliography.....	211

ABBREVIATIONS

AK Party	Justice and Development Party
ANAP	Motherland Party
AP	Justice Party
CCC	Council for Cultural Co-operation
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CHP	Republican People's Party
CMKP	Republican Villagers Nation Party
Congress	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
Convention	European Convention on Human Rights
Court	European Court of Human Rights
CPT	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
DİSK	Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye
DP	Democrat Party
DSP	Democratic Left Party
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EDC	European Defence Community
EDG	European Democrat Group
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
GRECO	Group of States against Corruption
JPC	Joint Parliamentary Committee
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
MSP	National Salvation Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Venice Commission	European Commission for Democracy through Law
YTP	New Türkiye Party

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kayhan Karaca¹ is a senior European correspondent, permanently accredited since 1999 to the Council of Europe and the European Union institutions. He has produced numerous television programmes and documentaries covering, inter alia, Türkiye's relations with the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. He currently serves as Vice President of a European Journalists Association composed of European journalists accredited to the Council of Europe and the European Parliament and is a member of the Club de la Presse Strasbourg-Europe. With long-standing expertise in Türkiye-Europe relations, he combines journalism with archival research to uncover overlooked aspects of Europe's institutional history.



1 Selected Books and Documentaries by Kayhan Karaca

- *Sous protection rapprochée – Le Conseil de l'Europe et les médias* (Éditions du Conseil de l'Europe, 2003)
- *Quelles solidarités pour l'Europe* (co-author, La Documentation Française, 2003)
- *Guarding the Watchdog – The Council of Europe and the Media* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2004)
- *Sessiz Devrim*, TV documentary on human rights (Türkiye, Council of Europe, European Union joint initiative for awareness raising on human rights, 2004-2005)
- *European Court of Human Rights* (TV documentary, NTV, 2007)
- *Birleşik Avrupa'nın Türk Öncüleri* (NTV Publishing, 2010)
- *Türkiye-Council of Europe*, (TV documentary, NTV, 2011)
- *Kıbrıs: Avrupa'nın Aile Kavgası* (TRNC Presidency Publishing, 2020)



« Fish & Shark »
© Council of Europe,
artist: Turhan Selçuk,
vinyl collage on
wood construction
(1.25x2.00),
donated by Türkiye

REMARK

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was known as the “Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe” until 1974. To avoid confusion, this book will use only the terms “Parliamentary Assembly” or “Assembly” throughout.



Numan KURTULMUŞ
Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye

Foreword by Numan Kurtulmuş

Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye

As the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, I am pleased to introduce this work, which offers a timely and comprehensive reflection on Türkiye’s longstanding engagement with the Council of Europe. Since 1949, Türkiye has stood among the founding members of this institution, contributing to the development of a Europe grounded in democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Our participation has never been incidental, nor has it been passive. From the earliest days, Turkish parliamentarians, diplomats, jurists, and civil servants have played an active role in the shaping and functioning of the Council of Europe’s institutions, helping to articulate its mission and broaden its reach.

This book captures the breadth and depth of that engagement, tracing Türkiye’s evolving role over more than seven decades. It also serves as a reminder—both to European audiences and to our own citizens—that Türkiye’s European identity is not defined by geography or short-term policy shifts, but by a deep and enduring institutional commitment. Our presence in the Council of Europe reflects a national consensus around shared democratic values, as well as a desire to contribute to a common political space where dialogue, legal standards, and cooperation can thrive.

In this context, parliamentary diplomacy remains a key dimension of our engagement. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has long served as a platform where elected representatives from diverse political backgrounds can meet on equal footing, exchange perspectives, and foster mutual understanding beyond the limits of executive diplomacy. Turkish parliamentarians, across generations, have embraced this platform to present their views, uphold democratic principles, and contribute to the pluralistic dialogue that defines the Assembly. In a rapidly changing Europe, such dialogue is not only desirable but indispensable.



Today's world presents complex and interconnected challenges. The digital revolution has raised pressing questions about the intersection of emerging technologies with privacy, human dignity, and democratic oversight. Environmental degradation and climate change demand just and coordinated responses. Cultural diversity, once considered a strength, is increasingly tested by the rise of racism, xenophobia, hatred against Islam, antisemitism, and other forms of intolerance. These are not peripheral issues; they lie at the heart of democratic legitimacy and social cohesion. The Council of Europe, as the continent's leading human rights organisation, remains an essential forum for addressing these issues collectively and constructively.

For Türkiye, engagement with the Council remains both a responsibility and an opportunity. In revisiting our shared history with the Council of Europe, we reaffirm our belief in a future shaped not by division or retreat, but by principled cooperation and a shared commitment to democracy. Parliamentary diplomacy, legal cooperation, and political dialogue will continue to form the backbone of this engagement—guided by the same spirit that brought us together in 1949.

I would like to thank **Kayhan Karaca** for this thoughtful and rigorous contribution, which not only documents an important chapter of our parliamentary history but also strengthens our collective understanding of Türkiye's role within the Council of Europe.



Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Foreword by Theodoros Rousopoulos

**President of the Parliamentary Assembly
of the Council of Europe**

The dream of a united Europe, a continent healed from the deep wounds of war and division, has long captivated the hearts and minds of visionaries along the centuries. From the ashes of conflict, a new hope arose in the aftermath of the Second World War: the Council of Europe in 1949. An institution dedicated to upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the Council of Europe became a beacon of shared values, promising a future where cooperation and understanding would prevail over national rivalries.

Another pivotal moment in European cooperation was the signing of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950, the 75th anniversary of which we celebrate in 2025. Its legacy as a cornerstone of human rights protection remains stronger than ever. Established by visionary leaders alongside the European Court of Human Rights, the Convention was designed to uphold fundamental rights and freedoms across Europe and ensure their enforcement.

This noble endeavour—the construction of a peaceful and prosperous Europe—was not the work of a few, but rather the collective effort of individuals from across the continent. It involved statesmen and diplomats, intellectuals and activists, all united by a common belief in a better future. While the contributions of some figures are well documented, others have remained, perhaps unjustly, less recognised.

Türkiye was among the earliest members of the Council of Europe, joining in 1950, and has since played a significant role in shaping the continent’s political, legal, and cultural landscape. From its commitment to democratic governance to its active participation in European institutions, Türkiye has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to the ideals of a united and peaceful Europe.



Throughout the decades, distinguished Turkish leaders have helped lay the groundwork for Europe's integration, advocating for dialogue, diplomacy, and co-operation. Whether in legal frameworks, parliamentary initiatives, or intergovernmental collaboration, their contributions remain valuable in shaping the Europe we know today.

I welcome **Kayhan Karaca's** work, *Turkish founding fathers of United Europe*. This book sheds light on the invaluable contributions of Turkish statesmen and diplomats to the European project—an often overlooked yet fundamental aspect of our shared history.

I commend the author of this book for his thorough research and insightful perspectives. This work is a valuable addition to our understanding of European history and serves as a reminder that unity is built through the collective efforts of many. I encourage all readers to engage with this book and to appreciate the contributions of Türkiye to our European journey.



Preface

The title of this book — *Turkish founding fathers of united Europe* — may come as a surprise to some readers. It may even provoke a smile. But perhaps it will also prompt reflection. That, precisely, is its purpose. This book invites readers to explore a largely unknown chapter in the history of Türkiye–Europe relations — a journey too often overlooked, yet central to understanding both Türkiye’s European vocation and the evolution of the continent’s post-war institutional landscape.

I have worked for many years as a European correspondent, and it was in the mid-2000s that I first had the idea of writing this book. I was in the Council of Europe’s television studios editing a story for broadcast, while the Council’s radio technician, Ernst, was cataloguing the audio archives. He asked me to listen to a recording without revealing its content. The sound came from a large, old record — larger than a standard LP — and the record player appeared to date from the 1960s. The speaker’s English was fluent, though marked by an accent. He was speaking about the future of Europe. After the speech, Ernst asked me if I knew who the speaker was. When I told him that I did not, he checked his notes and said it was Kasım Gülek. A well-known Turkish politician, Gülek was someone I had heard of before — but I had no idea he had any connection to the Council of Europe. Ernst told me that the speech had been recorded on 17 August 1949 in Strasbourg during a plenary sitting of the Parliamentary Assembly. From that day onward, I began to explore the Council of Europe’s archives. Through this research, I came to realise that the historical and political significance of the relationship between Türkiye and the Council of Europe is often underappreciated — and largely unknown — in contemporary Turkish–European dialogue.

This book is neither a historical novel nor an academic study. It is based on the contents of the Council of Europe’s archives and aims, modestly, to contribute to the dialogue between Türkiye and Europe and to shed light on Türkiye’s parliamentary diplomacy over the past seventy-five years.



Today, when we speak of relations between Türkiye and Europe, the European Union (EU) is usually the first institution that comes to mind. This is understandable: Türkiye aspires to become an EU member. At the same time, however, this relationship is fraught with challenges. While many European countries are EU members, the EU does not represent all of Europe. For instance, several Balkan states—as well as Türkiye, the United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—remain, at present, outside the EU, and perhaps always will. However, all these states are members of another European institution: the Council of Europe.

Following the Second World War, Türkiye's relationship with institutional Europe began not with the 1963 Ankara Agreement—which formalised ties with the European Economic Community (EEC)—but with its accession to the Council of Europe in 1949. The period between 1949 and 1963 holds particular significance in the institutional formation of Europe, as most of the political and legal values, criteria, and documents that define today's "Europe" were developed during this time. Unfortunately, an important truth has been largely neglected, both in Türkiye and across Europe. Even when it is acknowledged, it is often deliberately downplayed; yet Türkiye played a significant role in shaping these documents, values, and criteria. The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly not only witnessed but also recorded these contributions, which reflected Türkiye's active engagement in the post-war European project. Today, however, this historical reality is all but forgotten.

In the late 1950s, Türkiye began its relationship with the European Economic Community through its involvement in the Council of Europe. It is difficult to imagine where Türkiye would be today had it not been a member of the Council of Europe—but it is likely that it would never have applied for EU membership. No European country has joined the EEC or the EU without first becoming a full member of the Council of Europe. Given this, we can conclude that the Council of Europe has always played—and continues to play—a significant role in Türkiye's EU



accession process. There is no doubt that it will remain influential in the years to come.

Even if it is rarely acknowledged in discussions of international and European affairs, Türkiye's membership of the Council of Europe symbolises its "Europeanness" at institutional, political, and judicial levels. Türkiye was one of the countries that helped guide the Council of Europe along its path to success. This is why the Council of Europe remains the most compelling answer to those who persistently question or oppose Türkiye's European identity.

Another point worth emphasising is this: Türkiye was already part of Europe's institutional family and a partner of the EEC at a time when, for example, Greece was suspended from the Council of Europe due to its military junta, and Spain and Portugal were still under authoritarian rule. During that period, no one in Bonn, Paris, Rome, Amsterdam, Brussels, Stockholm, Copenhagen or Vienna was asking questions such as, "Why is Türkiye with us?" Do we have the right to say today, "That was another era"?

The archives of the Council of Europe reveal that, since its founding, questions regarding Türkiye's "Europeanness" or its place within the European family were never raised in any of the organisation's meetings. On the contrary, there are numerous statements by politicians from Germany, France, and other European countries affirming Türkiye's role in the European community.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the other side of the coin. Looking back over the past seventy-five years, Türkiye began to neglect the Council of Europe after the 1970s. The military interventions of 12 March 1971 and 12 September 1980 were largely responsible for this shift. The Council of Europe's archival material demonstrates that Türkiye was not excluded from the organisation due to these military regimes; rather, those regimes distanced the country from the values the Council of Europe stands for.

By turning away from the Council of Europe, Türkiye also drifted from the European Economic Community. The



military coup of 12 September 1980 triggered a sharp diplomatic and political backlash, severely straining Türkiye's ties with Europe. It took Turkish leaders nearly a quarter of a century to rebuild those relationships—yet the scars of that rupture remain visible even today.

In his speech before the Parliamentary Assembly on 10 May 1979, Bülent Ecevit—who was Prime Minister at the time—reflected on Türkiye's democratic struggles just a year before the 12 September 1980 coup. He spoke candidly about the country's political volatility, noting that “the democratic process has had its ups and downs in Türkiye.” During difficult periods, he said, when economic and social pressures threatened to derail democracy, membership in the Council of Europe served as a “compass” that helped Türkiye stay on course. While underscoring that the true safeguard of democracy lies in the people's commitment to freedom, Ecevit acknowledged the Council of Europe's role in helping the country avoid losing its way. His message remains as relevant today as it was over four decades ago—not only for Türkiye but throughout Europe, where the Council of Europe stands as a democratic compass extending from Iceland to Cyprus and from Portugal to the South Caucasus.

Kayhan Karaca

September 2025

The roots of the Council of Europe

At the end of the Second World War, Europe reached a turning point in its institutional development. One of the lesser-known efforts to foster greater unity was a proposed “alliance” between France and the United Kingdom, formulated during the war in June 1940. However, the French government ultimately rejected the project at the last moment—a decision that may well have altered the course of history.

At the time, France was deeply divided between two camps: those who supported collaboration with Nazi Germany and those who favoured resistance. Marshal Pétain, the deputy head of the French government, and General Weygand, a senior military commander, advocated for collaboration. In contrast, Interior Minister Georges Mandel and General Charles de Gaulle supported continued resistance alongside the Allies.

On 16 June 1940, as the French government prepared to sign an armistice with Nazi Germany, General Charles de Gaulle—opposed to this course of action—escaped to London. In the British capital, Jean Monnet, later known as one of the “founding fathers of Europe”, proposed to de Gaulle the idea of a Franco-British Union. At the time, Monnet was serving as President of the French Economic Committee in London and had also become the head of the Anglo-French Coordinating Committee, which oversaw joint planning of the two countries’ wartime economies. He had first moved to London at the age of eighteen to work in his family’s cognac business and was often referred to as “Mr Jean Monnet of Cognac”. De Gaulle later acknowledged Monnet’s proposal in his *Mémoires*.

Winston Churchill declared in his post-war book that the idea of unity between France and the United Kingdom originated in Britain. Although de Gaulle and Churchill disagreed over who first conceived the idea, they ultimately



reached an agreement on the project's content. The two leaders shared a common vision for this unprecedented initiative.

There was an urgent need to confront the growing threat of Nazism. The project aimed to unify the two countries in defence, foreign policy, and economic matters. This vision was more ambitious and comprehensive than the plan proposed by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman after the Second World War (9 May 1950), which focused primarily on the coal and steel industries.

In Churchill and de Gaulle's plan, the two nations would merge into a single, unified country rather than remain separate states. The proposal aimed to establish joint citizenship, a common foreign trade policy, a unified currency, a shared war cabinet, and a combined military command. This raised a critical question: who would be the "little fish" swallowed by the "big fish"? At the time, the United Kingdom appeared to hold the upper hand over France.

Churchill gave his approval to the proposal, and the French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, decided to place it on the Cabinet's agenda. However, the French government, having relocated to Bordeaux, was facing a severe crisis. Reynaud was caught between the "resisters" and the "collaborators" and ultimately failed to convince the Cabinet. Marshal Pétain, who later became a symbol of Nazi collaboration, rejected the proposal without even reading it.

The refusal of this proposal paved the way for Nazi collaborators and marked a critical crossroads in the Second World War. With this project, de Gaulle and Churchill sought to gain strength and momentum to confront Nazi Germany. Despite the lack of support from France, Churchill continued to advocate for the unification of European countries. The United States supported Churchill's vision, backing his efforts to create interdependence among European nations to prevent future wars and to unite against the growing threat of communism.



The second step in Europe's institutional structuring was the Hague Congress (also known as the Congress of Europe), held from 7 to 10 May 1948. The dates were no coincidence: Germany had laid down its arms on 8–9 May 1945. The logistics of the Congress were managed by Duncan Sandys, Winston Churchill's son-in-law and a Conservative member of the British Parliament. Sandys had played a central role in launching the European Movement in Britain the year before, in 1947.

Foundation of the
Council of Europe,
London, 5 May 1949

After the war, many supported the idea of a "unification of Europe", but reaching a consensus on its form proved difficult. Europe was divided into two camps: the "unionists" and the "federalists". The unionists, led by the United Kingdom, advocated intergovernmental co-operation. In contrast, the federalists proposed creating a European federal government, which would require each country to cede some sovereignty.



Despite his defeat in the 1945 election to the Labour Party, Churchill continued to play a key role in Europe's institutional structuring. In his speech at the Hague Congress, he reiterated his intention to establish a Council of Europe—a concept he had already proposed during the war.

This proposal divided the federalists into two factions: the “non-conciliatory” and the “moderate”. Ultimately, without explicitly naming the “Council of Europe”, they agreed to create an assembly composed of elected politicians from all democratic European countries. This assembly became the foundation of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, known today as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly).

At the Hague Congress, two key recommendations were adopted. The first called for the establishment of an economic and political union aimed at improving social welfare and security. The second recommended preparing a document on human rights—the European Convention on Human Rights—and establishing a European Court (the European Court of Human Rights) to safeguard those rights.

Following the Hague Congress, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was founded in 1948 to implement the U.S. Marshall Plan. Türkiye was already a member of the OEEC. Meanwhile, the British government began efforts to establish a Council of Europe at an intergovernmental level, initially involving the Brussels Treaty countries—Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The group was later expanded to include other OEEC member countries. Negotiations were primarily conducted between the United Kingdom and France. Italy, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Ireland were subsequently added to the United Kingdom's list, bringing the number of signatories to ten.

During this period, communists seized power in Prague, and the Soviet Union threatened Berlin with blockades. In this tense political climate, efforts to establish the Council of Europe accelerated.



The establishment of the Council of Europe in May 1949 marked a significant milestone in post-war European integration. Its creation was driven by a broad coalition of political and civil society forces, including Christian Democrats, the Catholic Church, anti-communist organisations, and certain Masonic networks that had influence within segments of the Social Democratic movement. The initiative also reportedly received financial support from the United States. While far-right extremists largely opposed the new body, scepticism mainly came from the Marxist left.

Edgar Morin, the French philosopher and sociologist, articulated his perspective on this matter in his 1987 work *Penser l'Europe*:

"For a long time, I was 'anti-European'. At the end of the war, when federalist European movements were emerging from anti-fascism itself, I wrote an article, published in *Les Lettres françaises* in 1946, with an unequivocal title: 'Europe No Longer Exists'. I had been a member of the Resistance, and I was a communist. For me—for us—Europe was a deceptive word."

He further stated: "I had fought against what Hitler had called the 'new Europe'. I saw in old Europe not the cradle of democracy and liberty, but the stronghold of imperialism and domination. What I perceived was not the truth of the discourse on humanism, reason and European democracy, but its falsehood: the appalling brutality of the conquistadors in Mexico and Peru, the enslaved and exploited Africa, the power of the German Reich. In the aftermath of the war, France and Germany remained colonial powers, and Germany, still in a deep coma, had yet to take on a democratic face. I was not only against the European oppressor; I was also on the side of the oppressed."

The Council of Europe was officially established on 5 May 1949 in London through a founding treaty signed by ten Western European states: the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Norway,



Denmark, Ireland, and Luxembourg. West Germany (officially the Federal Republic of Germany) was not among the founding members, as it had not yet been established—it would be officially formed on 23 May 1949.

The treaty's first article states: "The aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity among 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."

Türkiye and Greece had also applied for membership before the treaty's signing and were intended to be founding members. However, due to the urgency created by the Soviet threats against Berlin, the Council of Europe's establishment was expedited, and their memberships could not be finalised in time for the ceremony.

In addition to this procedural challenge, both Ankara and Athens faced political opposition from Scandinavian countries. During the Conference on the Establishment of the Council of Europe, held on 3–4 May at Saint James's Palace in London, Sweden and Norway did not oppose Türkiye's and Greece's membership outright, but objected to their inclusion as founding members.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Halvard Lange, speaking in a closed session, explained his position by highlighting the differing stages of democratic development: "I have no desire to disparage them, but it is a historical fact that they are at a different stage of democratic development. It would be wrong to admit them while excluding an established democracy such as Iceland. I believe no offence would be caused to Greece and Türkiye if it is explained that their admission must wait until after the organisation is constituted."

Swedish Foreign Minister Östen Undén echoed this position and likewise emphasised the priority of including Iceland. These Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, appeared to be forming a bloc within the Council of Europe focused on protecting their regional interests. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands,



Belgium, and Ireland opposed excluding Türkiye and Greece.

In response, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin proposed a compromise, circulating a draft paragraph for the post-conference communiqué: "The Conference took note of the requests by the Greek and Turkish Governments to join the Council of Europe. After discussions, it was agreed that their accession would be acceptable, and invitations under Article 4 of the Statute would be issued by the Committee of Ministers once it was established. It was generally hoped that Greek and Turkish representatives would be able to join the Council's deliberations shortly after its inauguration."



First European family photo: Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Council of Europe member countries attending the first meeting of the Committee of Ministers, Hôtel de Ville, Strasbourg, 8 August 1949

From left to right:

- Halvard Lange (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway)
- Dirk Stikker (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands)
- Necmettin Sadak (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye)
- Paul-Henri Spaak (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium)
- Carlo Sforza (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy)
- Édouard Herriot (Provisional President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe)
- Östen Unden (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden)
- Ernest Bevin (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom)
- Charles Frey (Mayor of Strasbourg)
- Robert Schuman (Minister of Foreign Affairs of France)
- Konstantinos Tsaldaris (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece)



French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman also spoke at the meeting, warning that rejecting Greece's and Türkiye's applications without clear explanation would be a "grave political error". He stressed that Council of Europe membership offered a unique opportunity to positively influence these nations: "If these countries are admitted, it would be possible to influence them for the better. The French Government would prefer their immediate admission, but since that is impossible, I am willing to accept the United Kingdom's proposal."

Italian Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza emphasised that Türkiye and Greece were "under the threat of Soviet expansionism" and deserved full moral support and assured membership.

UK Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin reminded the conference that Ankara and Athens had applied for membership prior to the meeting and argued that their applications could not be left unanswered. Responding to Oslo and Stockholm's insistence on prioritising Iceland, Bevin noted: "This country has not even applied for membership." Indeed, Reykjavik had yet to apply.

Reflecting these positions, the following note was added to the minutes of the founding conference of the Council of Europe, which concluded on 4 May 1949:

"The Conference notes the applications of the governments of Türkiye and Greece to become founding members of the Council of Europe. These applications could not be examined in time to avoid delaying the signing of the treaty. However, after extensive exchanges of views, it was generally agreed to respond positively to the candidacies of these two states. It was agreed that the matter would be addressed by the Committee of Ministers immediately after its formation, as stipulated by Article 4 of the Statute."

Sweden, Norway, and Denmark approved and signed this text alongside other Western European states.

The French city of Strasbourg, located directly on the French—German border and with a complex history of changing sovereignty between the two nations, was



chosen as the Council of Europe's headquarters. This choice symbolised European reconciliation and unity, making Strasbourg an emblematic first capital of Europe.

The Committee of Ministers, designed as the highest decision-making and executive body of the Council of Europe at the level of foreign ministers, held its first meeting on 8 August 1949 in the historic Strasbourg town hall, built in the 1730s. Turkish Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak and his Greek counterpart Konstantinos Tsaldaris were present alongside the foreign ministers of the other ten countries.

The Committee of Ministers' first decision was to admit Türkiye and Greece as members of the Council of Europe, allowing Ankara and Athens to participate fully in the institution's work from the outset. They thus became founding members of the Council of Europe.

Turkish delegation
attending the
first meeting of
the Committee of
Ministers of the
Council of Europe,
Strasbourg,
8 August 1949



The concept of the “European family” in institutional terms was effectively born that day in Strasbourg, with Türkiye and Greece among its original members. Today, the European Union, initially established as the European Economic Community in 1957, traces its roots to this Council of Europe family, as all founding European Economic Community countries were also members of the Council of Europe.

At the beginning: shaping Europe

On 10 August 1949, the inaugural session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe marked a historic milestone in post-war Europe. It was the first gathering of a modern, supranational European assembly, bringing together parliamentarians from democratic states across the continent. The chosen venue for this symbolic event was Strasbourg, France—a decision laden with profound political and historical significance.

Strasbourg, perched on the Franco-German border, had long been a contested city, repeatedly shifting hands between France and Germany over centuries of conflict. Its history embodied the very divisions Europe sought to overcome after the Second World War. From both cultural and strategic perspectives, Strasbourg symbolised the complexity of European identity and the urgent necessity of reconciliation between former adversaries.

For this reason, the United Kingdom strongly supported the choice of Strasbourg as the permanent seat of the Council of Europe and its newly established Assembly. British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin described the city as a powerful emblem of Europe's rebirth through unity. In his words:

"In search of a city that could symbolise the union of Europe and serve as a meeting place for European nations, there is no doubt that Strasbourg was the best choice we made. Strasbourg has witnessed many wars and instances of human cruelty, and yet it now stands as a beacon of peace and co-operation."

By selecting Strasbourg, the founders of the Council of Europe made a deliberate statement: the future of the continent would be built not on vengeance or division, but on shared values, institutional co-operation, and a



commitment to lasting peace. Strasbourg thus became not only the geographical heart of European democracy but also its moral and symbolic centre.

The city was adorned with white flags bearing the letter “E” symbolising “Europe” as the now-familiar European flag—twelve gold stars on a blue background—had yet to be adopted. (That emblem was later approved unanimously by the Parliamentary Assembly on 25 October 1955.)

The opening ceremony took place at the Palais universitaire in Strasbourg—a building whose construction began in 1872 during German occupation. This historic venue welcomed dozens of representatives from twelve European countries, including Türkiye. France, the United Kingdom, and Italy each sent eighteen parliamentarians; Türkiye was represented by eight; Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, and Sweden by six each; Denmark, Ireland, and Norway by four; and Luxembourg by three.

The first session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was held at Palais Universitaire in Strasbourg from 10 August to 8 September 1949





Prominent political figures attended the inaugural session, including Winston Churchill, Lord Walter Thomas Layton, and Sir David Maxwell Fyfe from the United Kingdom; Guy Mollet, Maurice Schumann, Paul Reynaud, Pierre-Henri Teitgen, and René Coty from France; Paul-Henri Spaak from Belgium; and Lodovico Benvenuti from Italy. While representatives from other member states may not have been widely known across Europe, many held significant political standing within their own countries. Türkiye's delegation included Kasım Gülek, Atalay Akan, Tahsin Bekir Balta, Feridun Fikri Düşünsel, Sait Odyak, Nazım Poroy, Suut Kemal Yetkin, and Ali Rıza Erten.

Margaret Herbison, a British delegate, was the sole woman participating in the first session. According to Council of Europe statistics, one-third of the parliamentarians were practising lawyers, one-quarter were educators, and nine were journalists. Only three members came from manual labour backgrounds. Alongside the parliamentarians, hundreds of diplomats, assistants, and journalists were present.

Prominent French parliamentarian Édouard Herriot was appointed provisional President of the inaugural plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly. A leading figure in France's secular Radical Party—which shaped the first half of the 20th century—Herriot was a steadfast advocate of secularism and a known admirer of the modern Turkish Republic. During his tenure as prime minister and foreign minister in 1925, he had endorsed the idea of European unification. He had previously aligned with Émile Zola and Anatole France during the Dreyfus Affair and served three terms as prime minister before the Second World War.

At 3:40 p.m., Herriot brought down the gavel, declaring: "In accordance with Article 3 (h) of the Agreement signed in London on 5 May 1949, I declare open the first sitting of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. I invite the three youngest representatives to take their places on the Bureau to fill the provisional function of secretaries. In accordance with the information which I have received, these are: MM. Nally (United Kingdom), Akan (Türkiye), and Drossos (Greece)." He continued with



a powerful speech: “We are here to defend freedom and justice, which are two great acquisitions of human civilisation.”

The Assembly’s next order of business was to elect its president. Broad consensus quickly emerged around the candidacy of Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgium’s first Socialist Prime Minister. Spaak passionately championed the idea of a British-led “community of Western European states”, although his efforts to persuade both de Gaulle and Churchill ultimately fell short.

From the outset, parliamentarians engaged in discussions about Europe’s future political structure. Each speaker championed the “ideal of Europe” and emphasised the urgent need for deeper co-operation among the continent’s peoples. Turkish parliamentarians were active and vocal participants in this emerging community.

On 17 August 1949, during a plenary debate on changes in the political structure of Europe, Turkish parliamentarian Kasım Gülek took the floor. A prominent member of the Republican People’s Party (CHP, social democrat), Gülek was well-versed in European and American affairs. In his speech, he articulated both Türkiye’s and his personal views on the Council of Europe and the broader project of European integration.

He began by declaring: “The eyes of the people of Europe, indeed, the eyes of the people of the world, are upon us. Their hope is with us. The task we have undertaken is of such vital importance that its success will mark the beginning of a new era. This is the beginning of a new conception in international gatherings.” Gülek stressed that the establishment of this community was a “matter of life and death” for Europe. He argued that unity and co-operation must be founded on the principles of human freedom and collective effort—not on divisions of language, religion, or other differences.

Drawing inspiration from the United States, he noted: “the United States of America is a historic example of what nations can accomplish if they unite. At the beginning, they also started as small independent states, but soon



their union made them a very strong and important world power. The task before the union of Europe is far more difficult and complex than the one which faced America. European nations carry with them centuries of tradition and prejudice. All this must be overcome, but it can be overcome. We are sure that this union is possible, and that is why we are here to try to establish it. Our aim is, and must be, a United States of Europe."

According to Gülek, creating a united Europe akin to the United States of America required re-examining the notion of sovereignty. As he stated:

"A United States of Europe will naturally entail difficulties and sacrifices as well as advantages. At the head of the sacrifices will be sovereignty; but this sacrifice has already taken place through various understandings among nations in international institutions. Indeed, if nations of the world must come together and decide on problems they must solve collectively, some of their absolute sovereignty must be ceded. The whole idea of absolute sovereignty is dying away, and a new idea of international sovereignty is emerging. European sovereignty is the goal at which we must aim."

Following Gülek's speech, Turkish parliamentarian Feridun Fikri Düşünsel took the floor. A graduate of the Paris Law School and a founding member of the Progressive Republican Party, Düşünsel contributed to the ongoing debate, which primarily focused on sovereignty and Germany's potential membership in the Council of Europe. While sharing Gülek's belief in the ideal of a united Europe, Düşünsel advocated a more cautious approach to sovereignty, emphasising the need for broader public understanding and careful implementation:

"For the future of Europe, foremost importance should be ascribed to the psychological factors. It must be admitted that public opinion in each European country needs to be considerably enlightened as to the aims of the Council of Europe. [...] I think that nobody has any doubt or hesitation as to the ideal we are pursuing, but to be sure of attaining our goal, we must not rush on precipitously. It is essential that the national sovereignties, which have been so



Feridun Fikri
Düşünsel,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly

from 13 August 1949
to 7 August 1950

laboriously established, should be respected. We must explain that problem to the national Parliaments, and we must endeavour to avoid creating conflicts between the influences of these two sovereignties which, in fact, are not incompatible. We must recognize from the outset, that there is a vast difference between the United States of America and the nations of Europe; we must therefore act prudently and avoid any conflict between sovereignties."

Düşünsel's remarks clearly reflected the diverging views among delegations. On the path to European integration, Western Europe was already

confronting internal divisions—particularly over sovereignty—and was entering a period of searching for new political horizons. One central topic during this search was the so-called "German question", which frequently arose in debates.

Danish parliamentarian Hermod Lannung addressed the Assembly and expressed his support for Germany's membership in the Council of Europe, arguing that such a step was essential for the continent's political future:

"I consider that the German Federal Republic should be invited to join us as an Associate Member of the Council of Europe as soon as the German Federal Government has been formed. It is important that Germany become an integral part of our new European community we are trying to build. To this must be added the fact that the battle of Germany today will be between the nationalists and federalists. If Germany is not admitted it will be a victory for the nationalists, and this will be extremely dangerous and may jeopardise Europe's future a great deal. If she is admitted, the federalists will be vindicated and will gain increasing support in the interest of our common cause."



The debate attracted numerous speakers, among them Winston Churchill, whose presence carried exceptional weight. Renowned as a key leader in the Allied victory against Nazi Germany, Churchill was also one of the founding fathers of the Council of Europe. His voice, therefore, held both moral and political authority.

Churchill had first envisioned the Council of Europe during the war. In a letter to the War Cabinet in October 1942, he wrote:

"I believe that Europe will survive in unity within the Council of Europe. I am dreaming of a United States of Europe where international barriers will be widely removed and there will be free movement."

Churchill had even proposed a political union between France and Britain as a symbolic first step towards European peace. Thus, few were surprised by the tone of his speech. True to prevailing British policy, Churchill supported the creation of an intergovernmental organisation. While he did not oppose the formation of a Consultative Assembly, he rejected the idea of granting it binding decision-making powers, arguing that it was premature to take such a step.

Churchill expressed no hesitation regarding Germany's membership in the Council of Europe, stating unequivocally:

"A united Europe cannot live without the help and strength of Germany. This has always been foreseen by the European Movement, to whose exertions our presence here is due. At The Hague, 14 months ago, where we resolved to press for the formation of this Assembly, a German delegation was present and was welcomed by all, especially the Representatives of France. One of the most practical reasons for pressing forward with the creation of a European Assembly was that it provided an effective means, and possibly the only immediately effective means, of associating a democratic and free Germany with the Western democracies."

Churchill proposed that the Council of Europe's decision-making body, the Committee of Ministers, place the issue of German membership on its agenda and, pursuant to



Article 34 of the Statute, convene an Extraordinary Session of the Consultative Assembly (Parliamentary Assembly) in December 1949 or January 1950 to deliberate on the matter. His proposal was duly taken into consideration by the Committee of Ministers.

Following Churchill's intervention, French parliamentarian Guy Mollet took the floor. Mollet was far from an ordinary political figure—he had been a prominent member of the French Resistance against the Nazis, and following the war, he rose to become Secretary General of the French Socialist Party. He also served as Vice-President of the Socialist International.

Mollet was a firm advocate of a United States of Europe and had even voiced support for a political merger between France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. His influence within European political circles would grow even further in the coming years, as he would go on to preside over the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from 1954 to 1956.

In his speech, Mollet stated that Socialists believed in the inevitable failure of liberal capitalism and thus bore a responsibility to lead efforts towards the unification of Europe and the world. He advocated for a European federation, declaring:

"The countries of Europe cannot preserve their independence against internal or external danger if they continue to claim a separate existence, one from the other. [...] Present-day Europe, which is now a mosaic, is an easy prey for totalitarian attack. A united Europe, on the contrary, owing to its geographical situation and its economic and social power, could today form within the world a buffer power which is necessary between the two giants of the East and the West, and, in the future, owing to its very diversity, the bridge which will be necessary between them."

He further affirmed that, should Germany adhere to democratic principles, European Socialists (Social Democrats) would support its membership in the Council of Europe.



Following his speech, Turkish parliamentarian Suut Kemal Yetkin took the floor. A professor of literature, Yetkin opened his remarks by voicing his satisfaction at taking part in the Parliamentary Assembly discussions and continued:

“The idea of a European federation is not new. It has already been put forward by several statesmen, but the circumstances have never been so pressing, or so propitious for the realisation of this ideal, as at this moment. If we wish to see an actual organic union between the peoples of Europe, we must reject many age-old prejudices and, as men of good will, we must coordinate our efforts for the achievement of this ideal. In the political sphere, the first thing is to give Germany her final form. A democratic Germany will necessarily have a place in a united Europe.”

Some French parliamentarians, such as Edouard Bonnefous, argued that a political union should precede the formation of an economic one. Bonnefous, who served as President of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the French Parliament, made this point during the Parliamentary Assembly plenary debate on 23 August 1949, which focused on the role of the Council of Europe in the economic field. He maintained that unless political union came first, economic union would either prove impossible or quickly collapse. For Bonnefous, it was no longer enough to abolish excise duties to establish an economic union; currency exchange had to be adjusted, the free transfer of currency re-established, and quotas as well as import and export licences eliminated. Most importantly, a specialisation of national industries had to be achieved. He posed a critical question: “What State would agree to abandon its key industries, if it had not first accepted the transfer of national sovereignty to a central authority?”

Like many of his French colleagues, Bonnefous regarded the issue of German membership as central. At the time, there was widespread concern that if Germany regained its industrial strength, it could destabilise the European balance. To counter this risk, he proposed that the various countries pool their natural resources under a joint



international administration. Bonnefous outlined a vision that would eventually take shape years later, driven by French initiative:

“A basic industry must be chosen as an example to show us how to break away from the old concepts of national frontiers and State sovereignties. The coal industry must obviously be selected as it is highly concentrated and forms the basis of all the other industries under government control; it is the principal industry of the four countries, or the group of countries, of Western Europe: Great Britain, France, Benelux and Germany; a European coal pool might claim the Rhenish-Westphalian coal as a common possession, to which all the States of Europe, including Germany, but not Germany alone, would have access.”

The following day, Kasım Gülek took the floor and reaffirmed positions he had previously expressed. He identified the persistent divisions within Europe as the principal cause of its deteriorating condition and advocated for the prioritisation of economic over political union. As he argued:

“Why has this Europe, with these potentialities of population, natural resources and industrial capacity, gone downhill and got into difficulties? The reason is that economically Europe is divided. Europe has been divided into small partitions and compartments; Europe’s industry and economy are inefficient, and she is divided economically. The solution to the economic problem is economic union. I consider that to be more important than political union: economic union is the beginning of political union. There is a great incentive to the economic union of Europe. That incentive is the dire necessity, which has been brought about by a federation of States in Eastern Europe, which was carried out by force. Western Europe must unite economically, or the downward trend will continue, and the first step in this union must be the removal of trade barriers among the States of Europe.”

At that time, economic reconstruction in Europe was inseparable from the framework of the Marshall Plan, under which the United States provided substantial financial aid. In return, Washington expected recipient states to lay the groundwork for an integrated and sustainable European economy. Gülek acknowledged this



interdependence, underscoring both Europe's gratitude and the expectations placed upon the United States, which he identified as bearing a unique responsibility owing to its dominant economic position:

"In discussing the economic ills of Europe, we must again mention the United States of America as a very important factor. I cannot see any solution which excludes the United States. The United States is today the greatest economic and financial power in the world. Its unique position is a privileged one; but this privilege entails, in the meantime, great responsibilities for the United States. The United States is shouldering these responsibilities in the shape of help to Europe, and we must admit that this help is of a very generous nature; but the billions contributed by the United States are paid by the man in the street, and it is he who feels the weight of the taxation just as any man in the street in any country feels the weight of taxation. We must realise that, after all, the United States is not the Santa Claus of the world."

Another Turkish delegate, Sait Odyak, adopted a more unequivocal stance. Speaking during the Parliamentary Assembly debate of 26 August 1949, Odyak emphasised the existential nature of European unification, casting it in stark terms of survival or collapse:

"We very plainly see and realise that Europe will either live as a whole or die and vanish as a whole. We all believe that we must make sacrifices and to contribute so that that Europe which is dear to us all might live. The faith, the determination and the willingness to sacrifice, which previously saved Europe from complete disaster, will no doubt soon pave the way which leads to that sacred goal of a United States of Europe."



First hoisting of
member states' flags
at the inauguration of
the Council of Europe
building,
7 August 1950

European identity

What does it mean to be “European”? How can we define “Europeanness”? Does such an identity truly exist—and if so, should it? What criteria might be used to construct it? These questions remain open-ended, and for now, no single answer can claim universal acceptance. For philosophical, political, and intellectual reasons, debates on these questions are likely to continue for a long time to come.

Although Türkiye is historically and politically part of Europe, it has tended to avoid engaging deeply in the debate surrounding European identity. Yet, considering its ongoing accession process and the prospect of future membership in the EU, it is essential that Türkiye actively engage in these discussions. Regardless of whether it ultimately becomes a member of the EU, Türkiye remains part of Europe as a member of the broader European family.

One of the most significant academic efforts to address these questions occurred in 2001–2002 under the auspices of the Council of Europe. Scholars and intellectuals from across the continent, including representatives from Türkiye, convened in Strasbourg to engage in an extensive dialogue on the concept of “European identity” and to seek a shared definition. In the end, however, the participants reached a consensus: it would be more constructive not to define European identity in strict terms.

They were guided by the well-known philosophical maxim often attributed to Spinoza and rooted in the thought of Thomas Aquinas: *“Omnis determinatio est negatio”* — “Every determination is a negation.” In that spirit, the group chose instead to explore what European identity is not, rather than impose a definitive, exclusive definition of what it is.

Following this approach, they concluded that “Europe” should not be viewed as a continuation of the Roman Empire, nor as a mere pursuit of power or an extension of Catholicism.



Moreover, defining “Europe” solely through cultural parameters is problematic. If we adopt such an approach, how then do we account for countries like the United States, Australia, and New Zealand — or even parts of Latin America — which are often considered part of the “Western” or “European” tradition? And where does Russia fit within this framework? If we further include religion as a defining factor of European identity, how do we classify the more than 22 million Muslims who live in EU countries and are, for the most part, EU citizens?

When viewed from a political perspective, the argument for Türkiye’s inclusion becomes even more compelling. Türkiye is a long-standing member of the Council of Europe, placing it within the same institutional framework as the EU’s 27 member states. While geography and culture shape our understanding of Europe, it is, at its core, a political project.

Even though the nine Foreign Ministers of the European Communities tried in 1973 to articulate the notion of European identity through a political declaration—one without binding effect and focused on shared heritage, common interests, and collective global responsibilities, while emphasising the dynamic nature of European unification—the work on defining this identity began much earlier. The foundational discussions trace back to 1949, shortly after the Second World War, when the concept of “Europeanness” gained momentum with the founding of the Council of Europe.

According to the Council of Europe’s archives, the Parliamentary Assembly first introduced this subject to its agenda on 26 August 1949, connected to a report titled “Method by which the Council of Europe can develop cultural co-operation between its members”, with Belgian Socialist parliamentarian Victor Larock appointed as rapporteur by the Parliamentary Assembly’s Cultural Affairs Committee.

In presenting the report during the plenary sitting, Larock highlighted the relative ease with which European countries could establish military co-operation, in contrast to the more complex task of fostering cultural, social, and economic collaboration. He stated:



"When we are setting out to arm the peoples of Europe intellectually and morally, to unite them in defence of the same civilising values, it is a militant conception of culture which we must affirm. Yet affirmation is the best form of opposition. European culture is opposed to totalitarianism. It clashes with national particularisms, with ideological antagonisms, and finally with 'the way of life' which the preponderance of capitalism engenders or fosters."

The debate was intense. French parliamentarian Léopold Sédar Senghor, of Senegalese origin, took the floor. A former prisoner of war under the Nazis, Senghor had fought alongside the French Resistance and later began his political career within communist and socialist circles. In his speech, he highlighted the significant contribution of Islam to European culture:

"The common heritage of Europe is the culture which was produced by grafting Christianity on Greek logic. I say Christianity but, as you know, Islam is Christianity's brother in spirit and in origin. You are aware of the important part played by Islam in transmitting the heritage of Greece."

In contrast, Greek parliamentarian Leon Maccas emphasized that the roots of European culture lay in Ancient Greece and Byzantine monasticism. He stated:

"The monks of Byzantium who had left their country owing to the fall of Constantinople, became the pioneers of Western civilisation, in the Western world, the forerunners and the artisans of the Renaissance, in an era when it was necessary to struggle through the almost impenetrable fogs of the Middle Ages."

Suut Kemal Yetkin addressed the topic of education, underscoring its foundational role in fostering European unity:

"When the peoples of Europe acquire these general and universal convictions, we shall be able to look to the future



Suud Kemal Yetkin,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly from
13 August 1949
to 7 August 1950



with the conviction that there will be no more war, that people will consider themselves as members of one single family, and that they can expect unequalled economic prosperity. Thus, the human and universal values which we so particularly cherish, will predominate in all the nations. To achieve this ideal, I think it will be necessary to reform the system of education. However, until then, the first step would be to set up a committee composed of competent scholars belonging to the nations represented here, with a view to drawing up the programme for a comparative history of civilisations. I also propose to set up another committee, composed this time of men of letters belonging to the nations represented here, who would prepare a list of representative works reflecting the eternal values of civilisation. The more people read and recognise themselves in the works of others, the more they draw together.”

He cited Türkiye’s own efforts as an example of this educational vision:

“In this respect, may I say a few words on the efforts made by Türkiye in this field. In less than 10 years, a division of the Ministry of Education carried out the translation of more than a thousand works, according to a plan drawn up by competent scholars. Thus, we made our children familiar with the spiritual values on which European culture is based and with the unity which is concealed under its diversity. These works reflect the soul of the peoples, and the States of Europe must endeavour to reach mutual understanding, by mutual translation of their most representative works. As the human being is the source of all things, if we want to have a Europe which will be united both in misfortune as in happiness, we must start with education. For, I repeat, even the success of our economy will depend on the education which we give to our people and to our children.”

Due to time constraints, not all parliamentarians who wished to contribute were able to do so during the initial discussions, and the sitting was adjourned to 6 September 1949. When it reconvened, the debate over the definition of European identity intensified, exposing a significant ideological rift between secular and religious visions of Europe’s cultural foundations.



A key moment came when Belgian Christian Democrat Ludovic Moyersoen voiced strong dissatisfaction with the Cultural Affairs Committee's report, particularly its limited recognition of the role Christianity played in shaping European civilisation. For Moyersoen and other Christian Democrats, Christianity was not merely one influence among many but a foundational moral and philosophical force that had profoundly transformed European society:

"One of the sources of our European civilisation is the lofty Greek and Roman culture, yet I think I remember that Athens and Rome, in the days of their splendour, recognised slavery as an institution. It was Christianity, which taught men that they were equal, and which tried to teach them to be brothers. It is therefore the Church which, if European civilisation means freedom, may claim to be the mother of European civilisation, because she was the mother of freedom."

Moyersoen's intervention reflected a broader concern among Christian Democrats that the emerging European project might become overly secular or technocratic, sidelining what they saw as the spiritual and ethical heritage of the continent. He argued that any meaningful conception of European identity must acknowledge Christianity's historical role in advancing ideas of human dignity, equality, and freedom.

His remarks, however, provoked strong reactions from secularist members of the Assembly, who feared that embedding religious narratives into the political framework of European co-operation could lead to ideological exclusivity. French Socialist parliamentarian Jean Le Bail responded pointedly, warning against reducing European identity to a single historical or religious narrative:

"Why bring up the old antagonism between ancient humanism and Christianity? Why try to insist that it was only at one special date that a superior kind of European culture came into being? Regarding liberty, it is true that the absolute notion of spiritual freedom came from Christianity, but it is also true that five centuries earlier, political liberty, as we know it today, already existed in practice in Athens. Regarding equality—setting aside the problem of slavery, which was, in certain respects, more economic than political or spiritual—the idea of equality



was clearly defined within the framework of the ancient city. We only must read the correspondence of Cicero, or Pliny the Younger, or the works of Seneca, to realise that the idea of equality is not an idea of purely Christian origin. Similarly, as regards fraternity, our third great principle, I should like to have before me certain texts of the orator Isocrates who proclaimed the necessity for community among human beings and who requested Athens to proclaim to the rest of the world the principle of the fraternity of this human community. Why then should we try to pretend that European civilisation dates from the first century, instead of simply trying to find all that unites us?"

Not all French representatives shared Jean Le Bail's secularist perspective. Among the dissenters was Jacques Bardoux, a member of the French right wing with a controversial political past. During the Second World War, Bardoux supported Marshal Pétain and served under the Vichy regime, which collaborated with Nazi Germany. Consequently, he was temporarily barred from running for office in the post-war period.

When given the floor, Bardoux proposed a revision to the preamble of the Cultural Affairs Committee's report, aiming to underscore the religious and historical foundations of European culture. He suggested the following amendment:

"European culture has its sources in Greco-Roman humanism, developed by Christianity, and enriched through many centuries by the working of free ideas."

This introduced a more explicitly Christian dimension to the conceptualisation of European identity, prompting immediate responses. Turkish parliamentarian Feridun Fikri Düşünsel objected to Bardoux's wording, expressing concern that such changes could derail the report's broader intent:

"The wording of the first paragraph of the preamble appears to me to epitomise and integrate the ideas of us all. It is an affirmation which is both true, wise, and in conformity with the nature of things and with our conceptions of evolution and of civilisation. If it is now proposed to include in that paragraph ideas which might



lead to debate, the declaration, which is to be issued in the name of the Council of Europe regarding modern civilisation, might give rise to a noteworthy debate. I therefore request the committee to maintain its text and to reject any wording which would not be consistent with the aim of the Assembly. It is the duty of our Assembly to unite nations and civilisations and advance with an unswerving purpose towards a unification of the whole of Europe."

Düşünel's remarks reflected broader unease about anchoring European identity too firmly in religious heritage, especially within a multilateral institution like the Council of Europe. His intervention highlighted the delicate balance the Assembly sought: acknowledging Europe's historical and cultural roots without alienating member states with differing religious, secular, or philosophical traditions.

Despite pressure from the Catholic lobby, rapporteur Victor Larock firmly stood by his report and declined to revise its wording. President Paul-Henri Spaak also rejected Bardoux's amendment, explaining that it was not merely "a question of form" but raised "considerable intellectual and philosophical controversies." The report and recommendation were subsequently adopted by a large majority of the Assembly.

Before the final vote, Feridun Fikri Düşünel took the floor with an unexpected proposal:

"At a moment when we are undertaking the task of unification, I would like to express a wish. In 1928, my country, Türkiye, made a significant leap forward by adopting the Latin alphabet and implementing a radical reform of its spelling system. I believe that unifying the spelling of European languages could represent another important step towards greater unity. For this reason, I intend to call upon the Committee on Cultural Questions, as well as Europe's most distinguished intellectuals, to examine this issue. A unified spelling system will bring great benefit to humanity."

This marked the first time since the Second World War that a supranational European institution formally debated the concepts of "European culture" and "European identity".



The first paragraph of the preamble to the adopted report and recommendation read as follows:

“European culture has its sources in the thought and work of free peoples based on centuries of tradition. It is one and varied. Its variety is derived from its origin. The differences in the structure and living conditions of nations are reflected in it, as are the many forms of free collective effort from which it comes. Generations of men and women of all social classes have left their mark on it.”

Throughout the 1950s, Turkish members of the Assembly consistently advocated for expanding the European idea. In 1953, Ziyad Ebüzziya, a Democrat Party (DP) parliamentarian and rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly’s Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs, authored a groundbreaking report titled “The Expansion of the idea of Europe on a local level”. This was the first post-war European report to focus on local governance. The report, debated by the Assembly on 24 September 1953, argued that Europe’s construction should begin at the grassroots, with local authorities playing a central role in disseminating the idea of European unity.

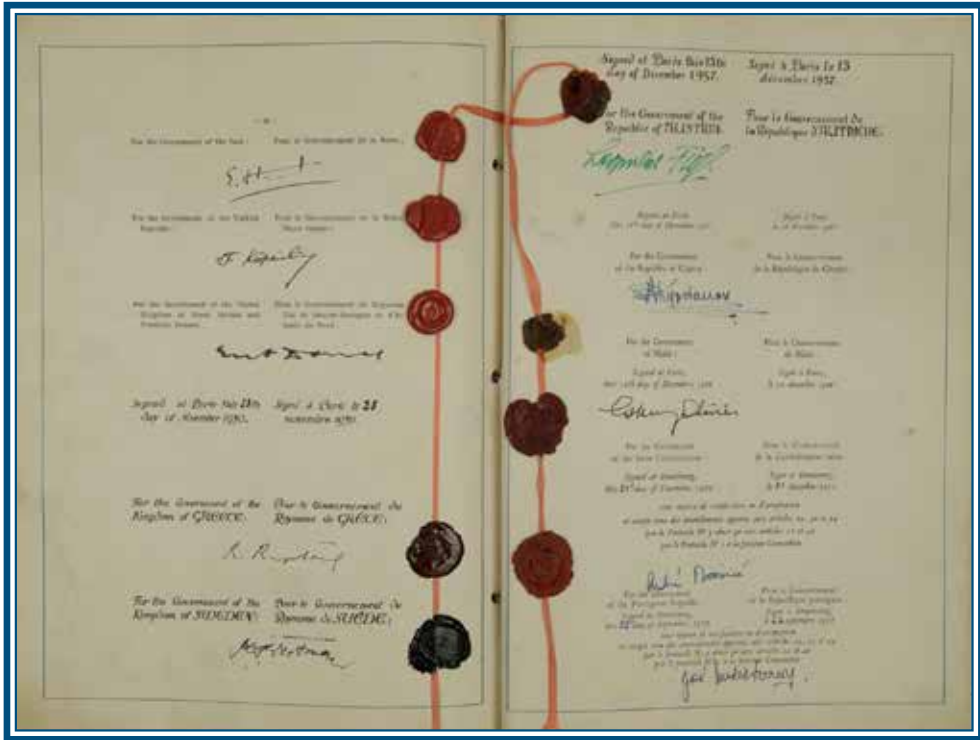
Ebüzziya was the first to propose creating a body to bring together local authorities from across Europe. His proposal laid the groundwork for the Conference on Local Authorities of Europe, established on 12 January 1957. This initiative later evolved into the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Congress).

The Congress, in turn, inspired the formation of the European Union’s Committee of the Regions in 1994. A significant milestone came in 2008, when Yavuz Mildon—a member of the provincial council of Çanakkale, a city in northwestern Türkiye—became the first Turk elected President of the Congress.

The birth of the European Convention on Human Rights

The Hague Congress, convened from 7 to 10 May 1948, issued a series of recommendations that would serve as the conceptual and institutional foundation for the Council of Europe. Chief among these was the call for a European Charter of Human Rights and the establishment of a supranational judicial body to ensure its enforcement. From the outset, the drafting of a legal instrument to safeguard fundamental rights and freedoms was identified as a core objective of the Council of Europe. To this end, the Committee of Ministers formally authorised the participation of the Parliamentary Assembly, assigning primary responsibility for the initiative to its Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions. Turkish parliamentarians Atalay Akan and Tahsin Bekir Balta served as members of this committee and contributed actively to its work. Prior to the plenary debate, the committee conducted more than forty hours of intensive deliberations on the proposed draft.

French parliamentarian Pierre-Henri Teitgen was appointed rapporteur. He presented a comprehensive report entitled “The draft convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Teitgen, a prominent French politician, lawyer, and member of the Resistance, had been a prisoner of war during the Second World War. A close ally of General de Gaulle, he co-founded the daily newspaper *Le Monde* in 1944 with de Gaulle’s backing. He later served as Minister of Justice (1945–46) and Minister of the Armed Forces (1947–48) and led the Popular Republican Movement—a Christian Democratic party—between 1952 and 1956.



European Convention on Human Rights

The inaugural formal presentation of the report on the proposed European Convention on Human Rights took place during the plenary sitting of the Assembly on 7 September 1949. This event marked a pivotal moment in the Assembly's efforts to establish a coherent framework for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms within the Council of Europe family. The report laid the groundwork for what would become a landmark legal instrument, aimed at safeguarding individual liberties across member states and reflecting a collective commitment to the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human dignity in post-war Europe.

During his presentation, Teitgen affirmed that the committee had reached a consensus to confine the scope of the Convention to fundamental civil and political rights enforceable within the domestic legal systems of member



states. These included: the right to personal security; the abolition of slavery and servitude; safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention; respect for private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of association and peaceful assembly; the right to form and join trade unions; the right to marry and to found a family; as well as the rights to education and to property. Although the inclusion of property rights and family-related provisions had been the subject of sustained deliberation, Teitgen noted that the committee ultimately resolved to retain these guarantees in the draft. With these provisions consolidated, the Convention was approaching its final form.

A central question arising from the drafting process concerned how the Convention's provisions—designed to guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms—would be implemented and enforced within member states. Two primary approaches were considered. The first proposed a unified European codification of fundamental rights, requiring the harmonisation of diverse national legal systems. This proved untenable, as the substantial legal divergences among member states rendered such codification impracticable. The proposal was thus rejected.

The second, more pragmatic solution—adopted by the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions—was to draft an international convention that would obligate each member state to incorporate the enumerated rights and freedoms into its domestic legal framework. In this way, national implementation would ensure compliance with a supranational instrument.

Attention then turned to the institutional mechanisms needed to guarantee and oversee the protection of these rights. Three competing models emerged. The first, supported by several delegates including Turkish parliamentarians, advocated granting individuals the right to petition in cases of alleged human rights violations. The second proposed the establishment of a Human Rights Committee, composed of respected legal and moral figures, whose non-binding recommendations would



serve as a moral compass for member states. The third model called for the creation of an independent judicial body with binding authority to adjudicate violations of the Convention.

The committee ultimately dismissed the first option—the individual right to petition—as insufficient on its own. Instead, it adopted a hybrid model combining elements from the second and third proposals. This compromise envisioned a two-tier system: an initial review of admissibility and substance by a committee, followed, where appropriate, by judicial examination before an international court.

The proposal for a “European Court of Human Rights” was introduced for the first time during the plenary sitting by rapporteur Pierre-Henri Teitgen. In a powerful address, he underscored the need for a judicial mechanism capable of responding to the gradual erosion of democratic norms:

“Democracies do not become Nazi countries in one day. Evil progresses cunningly, with a minority operating, as it were, to remove the levers of control. One by one, freedoms are suppressed, in one sphere after another. Public opinion and the entire national conscience are asphyxiated. Then, when everything is in order, the ‘Führer’ is installed, and the evolution continues even to the oven of the crematorium. It is necessary to intervene before it is too late. A conscience must exist somewhere which will sound the alarm to the minds of a nation menaced by this progressive corruption, to warn them of the peril and to show them that they are progressing down a long road which leads far, sometimes even to Buchenwald or Dachau. An international Court, within the Council of Europe, and a system of supervision and guarantees could be the conscience of which we all have need, and of which other countries have perhaps a special need.”



Following Teitgen's speech on 8 September 1949, a debate ensued in which Turkish parliamentarians actively participated. As Europe began constructing the institutional scaffolding of what would later evolve into the modern human rights regime, the Assembly became a crucible for testing the limits of sovereignty in a new, multilateral order. For many member states, including Türkiye, the prospect of delegating elements of judicial authority to a supranational body raised complex legal and political questions. Turkish parliamentarians—like many of their counterparts—sought clarity on the procedural and constitutional implications of these developments. Their concern was not merely theoretical: at stake was the foundational principle of national sovereignty and the degree to which it might be compromised in the name of European unity and human rights protection.

Fuad Köprülü,
Minister of Foreign
Affairs of Türkiye,
signing the European
Convention on Human
Rights, Rome,
4 November 1950



Feridun Fikri Düşünsel emerged as one of the most articulate and persistent voices in this debate. His interventions were consistent and carefully calibrated. Just three days earlier, during a debate on “the political structure of Europe”, he had expressed reservations about any attempt to subject national constitutions to scrutiny or harmonisation through the Parliamentary Assembly. He defended the 1923 Turkish Constitution as one of the most democratic and legally advanced in Europe, asserting the adequacy of national legal frameworks in upholding democratic values.

When the Assembly turned to the proposal for a European Court of Human Rights, Düşünsel again raised objections. He cautioned against permitting individuals to bypass national legal systems, warning of confusion and overlap between national and international jurisdictions. In response, Pierre-Henri Teitgen sought to offer reassurance. Taking the floor, he underscored the procedural safeguards built into the draft convention:

“Mr Düşünsel hoped that it should be clearly stated that the international Court would not in any way be a Court of Appeal having jurisdiction to annul or suspend verdicts given by internal courts. The jurisdiction of the Court shall extend to violations of the obligations defined by the Convention, whether they result from legislative, executive or judicial decision. [...] It is therefore necessary that the verdict should have been given by an incompetent and irregular court; or else that it should have been given in obvious violation of the guarantees of procedure and the rights of defence; or else that it should have applied laws which did not exist at the time of the events which are under adjudication. Apart from these conditions, a verdict given by internal courts of justice may not be submitted to the international Court.”

Despite this clarification, Turkish concerns persisted. Düşünsel returned to the podium, warning of institutional confusion and the potential erosion of national judicial authority:

“We must not create confusion between the courts of each country and an international court. We are about to



agree that the decisions of the courts of each country shall be respected. If not, a case will be considered by a court, will pass to appeal, and will at the same time come before an international court. It is not, therefore, the State which will be tried, but the courts of each country. [...] We shall later have many difficulties if we do not now define the path we wish to follow, and the organs we wish to create."

Another Turkish parliamentarian, Atalay Akan, echoed this caution. While not opposing European co-operation in principle, he warned against moving too quickly towards integration:

"We are only in the first stages of achieving a united Europe. I must admit that we are still far from this end. Nevertheless, the political, economic and social structure must develop in a harmonious manner. Before a united Europe can be achieved, it will be very difficult to obtain approval on this point from national Parliaments, despite their concern for the protection of human rights, because their national courts would be subjected to the control of a supranational body."

Akan's remarks captured the broader geopolitical hesitation shared by many delegations: while the aspiration for unity and rights protection were genuine, the method and pace of that transformation remained contested. The Turkish delegation's contributions revealed a sophisticated legal understanding and a determination to ensure that the emerging architecture would complement rather than compromise national institutions.

The concerns voiced by Düşünel and Akan remain instructive today, offering an early view of the structural tensions that would continue to shape Europe's human rights system. For Türkiye and other founding members, these debates were not about rejecting European ideals but about ensuring that integration was grounded in clearly defined, stable legal foundations.

Some parliamentarians also expressed doubts about including the right to property in the Convention, viewing it as less fundamental than other individual rights. Turkish parliamentarian Kasım Gülek, however, strongly defended its inclusion:



“We are preparing a Declaration of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms for a united Europe. We shall guarantee these rights and freedoms, and we shall establish a supranational court to implement this collective guarantee. The right to own property is one of these rights. Moreover, it has been drawn from the United Nations Declaration. To omit the right to own property from this European Declaration would be a serious omission, with considerable repercussions on public opinion in all countries—particularly since this right is included in the committee’s report. The postponement of a decision in this matter, after such a long debate in the Assembly, will only heighten its significance.”

At the same time, Gülek voiced concern over the provision allowing individuals to bring direct claims against their own state:

“In accordance with the recommendation of the report, an injured individual may bring an action against his own State before this supranational Court. It seems to me that this will present difficulties in the first stage of European union. I would have preferred, in this initial stage, that the injured individual should only enjoy a right of petition. Consequently, I shall abstain from voting on the report.”

The report and recommendation were voted on by 86 parliamentarians: 64 voted in favour, one against, and 21 abstained. Parliamentary Assembly President Paul-Henri Spaak adjourned the sitting at 12:26 a.m. on 9 September 1949. That night marked the beginning of one of Europe’s most significant legal undertakings: the European Convention on Human Rights.

France, Italy, Belgium, and Ireland supported the creation of a court, whereas the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Greece, and Türkiye opposed the proposal. Member States also failed to reach consensus on the precise role of the commission proposed by the Assembly. Further doubts were raised as to whether the Committee of Ministers was the appropriate body to be entrusted with decision-making powers concerning alleged violations of human rights — a function of a fundamentally judicial nature.



Considering these divergences, the Committee of Ministers decided to refer the entire question to a conference of senior officials, which met in June 1950. Despite persistent disagreements, the conference ultimately succeeded in producing a single draft, reflecting the majority position on each disputed point. Notably, the compromise reached on the court's establishment was that its jurisdiction would be optional: Member States would retain the freedom to decide whether or not to accept it.

The Convention returned to the Assembly's agenda on 16 August 1950. Following the Turkish elections of 14 May, Türkiye's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly now included members of the Democrat Party (DP), a conservative movement. DP parliamentarian Cihad Baban spoke during the debate, affirming that human rights had been central to his party's campaign:

"I want to assure you that the debates on the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms are followed in my country very closely and with an ever-increasing interest. In fact, the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms was one of the essential items on the programme of the Democrat Party to which I belong. Perhaps... No! Not perhaps – it is certain that this attachment to the defence of human rights, which was one of the main themes of our electoral campaign, not only procured for us an overwhelming majority but also enabled Türkiye to complete the revolution of its parliamentary regime. The draft convention we are discussing today is of much greater importance, because it will one day, and very shortly we hope, be the basis of European public law."

Baban also invoked the global context, particularly the threat of communism:

"We [in Türkiye] have no desire to see democratic institutions annihilated by brutal methods, neither can we admit that a small minority, urged on by an unprecedented imperialism, shall snatch away the liberty and independence of free nations and drag them into servitude and poverty against their will. Neither can we admit that independent



Cihad Baban,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
7 August 1950–
1 January 1953

countries shall be transformed into huge prisons or vast concentration camps. In order to explain exactly what I have in mind, I should add that these ideas have perhaps been suggested to me because we find ourselves on the very frontier of Slav imperialism, and more than anyone else, we feel today the need of defending our young democratic regime. [...] We shall be happy—at least that is my private opinion—if clauses can be embodied in the Convention to ensure the protection of democratic institutions, without which the defence of human rights will be a mere illusion.”

This marked the final sitting of the Convention’s preparation stage. The European Convention on Human Rights, without including the right to property, was opened for signature on 4 November 1950 at the Barberini Palace in Rome and signed that day by twelve member states, including Türkiye. The right to property, along with the rights to education and free elections, was incorporated into the Additional Protocol, signed on 20 March 1952 in Paris, with Türkiye again among the first signatories.

Türkiye ratified the Convention on 18 May 1954. Notably, Kasım Gülek—who had initially expressed reservations—would later affirm in a 1958 debate that the Convention had become “a source of pride to the Council of Europe”.

Yet, despite Türkiye’s active participation in drafting the Convention, Turkish citizens were unable to bring cases before the European Court of Human Rights (the Court) for more than three decades. This changed when Turkish Foreign Minister Vahit Halefoğlu, then serving as Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, announced Türkiye’s decision to allow individual applications to the Court on 28 January 1987 in Strasbourg. Türkiye subsequently recognised the Court’s jurisdiction on 27 September 1989—the same day Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal visited Strasbourg to address the



Parliamentary Assembly and meet with members of the Court.

For many, accession to the European Convention on Human Rights has come to symbolise a country's full inclusion in the European legal and political order. The European Court of Human Rights, as guardian of the Convention, has become an essential avenue of recourse for hundreds of millions of people across the Council of Europe's member states—currently 46, following Russia's exclusion after its war against Ukraine. Between 2000 and 2015, the Court experienced an unprecedented surge in applications, prompting many observers to describe it as a "victim of its own success".

Today, the Court continues to cultivate a shared European judicial space. It does so not only by ruling on fundamental rights such as the right to life, protection of property, fair trial guarantees, and the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, but also by addressing contemporary challenges. These include end-of-life decisions, adoption rights, DNA testing, abortion, body searches, bioethics, genetic engineering, and the protection of journalistic sources. The Court has also examined issues such as hate speech, racial profiling, the detention of migrants, religious symbols, violence against women, access to the internet, personal data protection, mass surveillance, terrorism, environmental and climate concerns, the regulation of football matches, austerity measures, and taxation.

Judgments of the Court have compelled governments to reform legislation and administrative practices across a wide array of fields. Notable examples include conditional release laws in Germany; military discipline procedures in the Netherlands; the rights of children born outside marriage in Belgium; legal protections for psychiatric detainees in Austria; provisional arrest protocols in Denmark and Greece; custody rights for children of divorced parents in Finland; the structure of administrative courts in Portugal; compulsory religious education in Sweden; and the Swiss criminal procedure code.



In Türkiye, significant reforms have been undertaken concerning State Security Courts and detention periods. It is important to underline that many of the legal reforms adopted in Türkiye—especially since 1999—under the banner of “EU harmonisation laws” are in fact embodiments of what might be called *Common European Law*, shaped decisively by the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.

The first judges of the European Court of Human Rights were elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 21 January 1959. The Court held its inaugural session from 23 to 28 February 1959 in Strasbourg and adopted its Rules of Court later that year, on 18 September. It delivered its first judgment on 14 November 1960 in the landmark case of *Lawless v. Ireland*.

As of 30 June 2025, the Court had 60 200 applications pending before a judicial formation.

Although most cases before the Strasbourg Court are individual applications, the Convention also permits inter-State applications—cases brought by one State Party against another. While grounded in law, such applications often reflect broader political disputes. The first two inter-State cases were submitted by Greece against the United Kingdom in May 1956 and July 1957, both concerning alleged human rights violations in the Crown Colony of Cyprus.

The Schuman Plan and Turkish parliamentarians

Turkish parliamentarians from the DP, who began their work in the Parliamentary Assembly in August 1950, shared a broadly similar perception of “Europe” with the previous Turkish delegation, albeit with some nuanced differences. Osman Kapani (DP), one of the new delegates, articulated this evolving vision in his first address to the Assembly on 9 August 1950. In an idealistic speech, he called for prioritising the “interests of Europe” above individual national interests:

“I am profoundly convinced that if we have the courage to put the spirit and interests of Europe above our individual and national interests, as well as our political loyalties, no disputes or differences will impede our deliberations. In my opinion, no obstacle can halt the momentum of the movement towards a united Europe. Neither race nor religion can hinder the realisation of this common ideal. I am particularly gratified to see colleagues who differ from me in colour and belief taking their places in the Assembly. Moreover, the theory of the sovereignty of the State can no longer prevail in the face of the monumental edifice we are in the process of constructing. This theory will be toppled from its throne just as swiftly as the idea of European unity becomes ingrained in people’s minds. My dear colleagues, I am certain that European unity will soon be achieved, and the precise form and title of its government are of little consequence! I hope you will not accuse me of undue optimism if I say that I am convinced that European citizenship will become a reality in the near future. When travelling to other continents, we shall be proud to carry a European passport and to be called citizens of Europe.”

Kapani thus acknowledged the need to rethink traditional concepts of national sovereignty and praised Winston Churchill for his recent speech calling for the rapid creation



of a “European Confederation.” He noted that although the idea of a federal Europe was losing ground to that of a more centralised structure, the determination of European federalists remained inspiring.

At the time, the central debate in Europe concerned the future of the continent as outlined in a bold proposal by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, announced on 9 May 1950. Schuman presented the details of this plan to the Parliamentary Assembly during a plenary sitting in Strasbourg on 10 August 1950. However, the United Kingdom did not support France’s unilateral initiative to pool European coal and steel production under a supranational authority. As a result, the Parliamentary Assembly debates that followed became a contest of visions between France and the United Kingdom.

On that day, British Conservative MP Lord David Eccles took the floor and declared:

“The Schuman Plan is a test case. It is a test case for my own country. Whether Britain comes in or stays out will have enormous consequences for European unity. Since we have the immense advantage of Mr Schuman’s presence here today, I want to ask him one question, which is: how can it be possible that the French Government, who all along have been the champions of the Council of Europe, can support the creation of another Assembly of Members of Parliament and yet another Committee of Ministers? If the argument is that some of the Members of this Assembly will not be Members of the Schuman Plan, then surely that argument should lead to the opposite conclusion; for M. Schuman’s great idea, when brought into operation, is bound to create a quasi-monopoly of the producers of iron and steel in Europe. Those countries who, through no fault of their own, must continue to import iron and steel, are bound to be anxious about guarantees of supply they can get from a single producer. The voice of the consumer ought to be heard, and surely the Council of Europe is the place where we can give the guarantee that the splendid conception of the French Government will not in fact turn out to be a cartel



made into an honest woman of colossal proportions. I cannot believe that any one of our Parliaments will support the experts' proposal to create another European Assembly, for this would put an end to the Council of Europe."

Labour MP Ronald W. G. Mackay, speaking on 26 August 1950, was equally critical:

"I say bluntly to my continental colleagues and friends that they know they are dishonest when they say that they will go on without Great Britain. Let them do so if they wish, I would like to see it done, as that would be a great step forward, but they know that they cannot do it for a number of reasons, which I have not time to elaborate now. Why not say that there are 15 countries represented here who have different ideas about Europe but with a common task? Our task is to see to what extent we can convert this body—which is little more than a talking-shop, and not a very good one at that—into an effective European political authority; for if we succeed, our success will mean a great deal for the future of Europe."

During a plenary debate on 28 August 1950, focused on a report from the Committee on General Affairs, French rapporteur Guy Mollet responded to the growing scepticism surrounding European integration. Several parliamentarians had suggested that countries like the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark were unlikely to join such a union. Reflecting the broader sentiment of French federalists, Mollet offered a stark rebuke:

"All speakers have let it be understood that obviously Great Britain would not join and the Scandinavian countries likewise. It is therefore clear that if Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Ireland remained outside, the Netherlands would have difficulty in joining, and, to the extent that it would be difficult for them, I think the other Benelux countries— Belgium and Luxembourg—would remain outside. Proceeding by this method of elimination, let us now see what remains: Italy, Germany, France, with perhaps Greece and Türkiye. I apologise, but I have the habit in political life of saying what I think. I say sincerely



that if it is a question simply of Italy, Germany and France uniting, I am against it. [...] In the first place, I am against it because I am a European. I am also a federalist, but federalism is a mean of making Europe. I would rather work for the unity of Europe without adopting the federal method, than to claim to be a federalist, if it would simply mean the union of one part of Europe. I am also against it because I am a Socialist. I am against it because a union of France, Germany and Italy would run the risk -no doubt for everyone but certainly for France- of ending in solutions which I should never consider as being progress on the road towards Socialism. [...] No, Europe will be made with everyone in it. A united Europe, a more united Europe, will be made with everyone or it will not be made at all."

Mollet also directly addressed the criticisms raised by his British and Nordic counterparts:

"I turn to my Labour and Scandinavian colleagues to say to them: you are preventing us from building Europe. You are creating the separatist movement from which others will benefit. I have even heard one of the Labour representatives in this Assembly telling us to try out the experiment. You know only too well that is simply not possible, and that we shall not do so."

Many parliamentarians, however, remained reluctant to take sides in the Franco-British dispute. Germany had only recently joined the Council of Europe, on 13 July 1950. German delegates, still constrained by the burden of recent history, did not yet feel in a position to deliver bold proposals or assertive speeches. In a poignant address, Eugen Gerstenmaier of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) articulated the German perspective:

"I think I may say that there has been a profound change in the German national conscience as the result of all its past suffering. In declaring ourselves in favour of a united Europe, we are leaving aside all considerations of private advantage. All we have been through and all we have suffered prevents us from regarding a European union merely as a matter of national advantage. By inviting us to come here, my eminent colleagues, you have given us the possibility of finding ourselves again and emerging from



the desert and the destruction to which we were banished by a disastrous tyranny. For, Ladies and Gentlemen, we Germans feel no more at home than you do in places where liberty and justice are oppressed. We feel at home here, within the community of the free nations of Europe."

Earlier that month in Strasbourg, Robert Schuman had presented the European Coal and Steel Community as 'an organisation solely for economic purposes.' However, he was unable to convince the British parliamentarians of this characterisation. The political ambitions of the Schuman Plan would be articulated a few months later by Paul Reynaud, a leading figure of the French delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly. Reynaud, who served briefly as France's Prime Minister during the early months of the Second World War, was instrumental in bringing two pivotal figures of French history into political prominence: Marshal Philippe Pétain, later head of the collaborationist Vichy regime, and General Charles de Gaulle, who emerged as a national hero after the war.

As Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Economic Questions, Paul Reynaud delivered a speech on 21 November 1950 during a plenary debate. He elucidated the political purposes of the Schuman Plan, using France and Germany as examples:

"What is the Schuman Plan? It has, as you know, a dual aspect – on the one hand political and on the other economic. From both points of view, indeed, it spreads its mantle over the problems of steel and coal. On the political plane, armaments are basically dependent on steel. Any two countries having welded together their two industries of steel and coal would find it difficult to break away and proceed to fling tons of steel at one another's head. In any case, may I say, I believe there is not a single person here who will not welcome with the greatest satisfaction the fact those two countries, who for nearly a century have experienced such grave difficulties in their relationship, are today joining hands in an effort which is the concern of Europe as a whole. From the economic point of view, the



marriage of steel and coal allows of and brings in its train other such couplings. It allows of other couplings, since it sets the standard for the bulk of industries; and it brings other forms of unification in its train since it implies a certain measure of common policy in the fields of transport, taxation, wages and social security.”

The Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly did not adopt a clear position. On 28 November 1951, during the debate on “aims and prospects of European policy”, Osman Kapani (DP) presented an interesting evaluation that reflected, at least in part, the views of the majority of the Turkish delegation:

“Some of you have defended the concept of a continental federation based on France, Germany and Italy. I am bound to say that it would not be possible for Türkiye to join such a federation. We are ready to give our support and our good wishes to any countries which desire to unite. We fully believe that by so doing, they would be serving the cause of the free world, but we would ask them to understand that we cannot join them. A continental bloc consisting of France, Germany, Italy and perhaps the Benelux countries would, undoubtedly, form a coherent whole with its strategic interests centred on the defence of the Alps and the Rhine. You will understand that Türkiye’s preoccupations are quite different; they are governed by its geography and its history and relate to more general aspects. On the other hand, if a complete European federation were set up—including Britain, Scandinavia and all members of the Council of Europe—or again, if an Atlantic federation could be achieved, I think that Türkiye would be quite prepared to take part unreservedly. Such a federation, by its very extent and by the volume of its interests both in Europe and overseas, would have to draw up sufficiently comprehensive plans to consider the special concerns of Türkiye.”

Kapani’s remarks appeared to be inspired by British parliamentarians. Had the young Republic of Türkiye, deeply committed to its sovereignty, reached a decision?



Not quite. There were Turkish parliamentarians, such as Kasım Gülek (CHP), who advocated for rapid European integration. On 10 December 1951, Gülek delivered a speech during a plenary sitting of the Parliamentary Assembly, stating:

“During this Session some particularly great difficulties in the way of European union have been revealed. One of these has arisen from the attitude of our friends in the United Kingdom. It must be admitted that their attitude has been a disappointment to the rest of Europe. The Assembly has now to decide whether Europe should unite without Britain and those countries which hesitate to take part immediately in this union; in other words, whether the goal of uniting all Europe must come as a second step, and whether the first aim should be to unite those countries which are willing to unite now. I think it is wise that those countries which are now ready to unite should go ahead and that we should not wait for those which are merely willing to associate themselves with the idea and to join later. [...] Our British friends have a way of thinking which is different from that of Continental Europeans. The British believe in what they call ‘muddling through’, as opposed to our method of trying to have everything clearly planned and prepared beforehand. We have to understand the situation of Great Britain, and we must also realise that an ultimate union of Europe cannot take place without Great Britain, just as Britain cannot exist outside a united Europe. One of the difficulties which the British have stated seems to hinge on the question of sovereignty. They seem to think they cannot cede any part of their sovereignty to a union. In the world in which we now live, there is in fact no more absolute national sovereignty. Every nation has already ceded some part of its sovereignty, and it is very difficult to understand how Britain can speak of this absolute national sovereignty when air bases owned and managed by America exist today on British soil.”



Osman Kapani,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
7 August 1950–
1 January 1953

It was clear that Gülek and Kapani held differing visions on this critical issue. Much later, amid the discussions on British membership in the EEC, Gülek delivered a speech on 30 January 1968 during a Parliamentary Assembly plenary debate in Strasbourg, entitled "General policy of the Council of Europe":

"The paramount problem before Europe today is the need for unity for Europe. This, indeed, is the main task of the Council of Europe. Two giants, two super-Powers, exist in the world. In face of this fact, no European nation can stand alone. We feel that an historic step towards the goal of unity has been taken with the formation of

the European economic union. The tremendous success of this is witnessed by all. Now we find that an important European country, the United Kingdom, wants to join the Community. Why the United Kingdom did not join at the beginning is difficult to judge at this time. Perhaps it was an error of judgment. Of course, if this had happened, all these problems would not now be facing us. For my part, I feel sure that Britain is sincere in declaring that she is European and wishes to join that most important European organisation. We think that she is sincere because now the era of Empire has gone. Britain is rapidly reviewing her overseas commitments. 'East of Suez' is disappearing. The 'Empire on which the sun never sets' is gone. The British Navy, which was once larger than all the navies of the world combined, is not there anymore. I would like to pay special tribute to the gallant British nation, which was bled by two world wars in defence of freedom and democracy. We feel that Britain must be allowed to join the Community, which would be a big step towards the unity of Europe."

The speeches of Turkish parliamentarians on the Parliamentary Assembly platform regarding the institutional construction of Europe reflected Türkiye's commitment to "European solidarity", seen as a path towards its own



economic development. From the beginning of the Parliamentary Assembly, Turkish representatives consistently supported ideas such as a customs union, monetary union, free movement of persons, and even the creation of a European Central Bank. Kasım Gülek, for instance, voiced his willingness to pool raw materials for European industry and to dismantle customs barriers within the Council of Europe's member states. In exchange, he called for Europe to provide technology, expertise, and capital to less-developed countries like Türkiye.

Türkiye assumed the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the second time from 15 April to 20 November 1958. As Chairman-in-Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatin Rüştü Zorlu travelled to Strasbourg on 29 April, where he addressed the Parliamentary Assembly and outlined Türkiye's vision for European integration:

"We must rejoice at the birth of the European Economic Community, which must grow and ensure European economic integration by joining forces with other countries of the OEEC and of Europe in creating a free trade area, without which Europe would be even more divided. But all who are taking part and those who are following these proceedings are aware of the difficulties to be overcome before that free trade area can be successfully instituted. In face of the dangers which threaten her, Europe must gather all her strength and energy and throw them in the scale. To do this, she must establish complete fellowship in a common cause among all her members. It is this policy of fellowship and unity which has so often been vigorously proclaimed and promoted by the Consultative Assembly. [...] How can Europe be expected to extend her influence throughout the world if she fails in establishing complete fellowship within her own boundaries, and if she does not try to solve the problems responsible for the unequal standards of living prevailing among her countries? By trying to solve these problems, Europe will set an example of equity and social progress to the whole world. I, myself, think that economic integration should precede the coordination of the policies of European States because, in my opinion, one cannot discuss political



coordination without discussing economic integration and solidarity; these should, if not precede, at least accompany any attempts to institute a coordinated or unified foreign policy.”

A few months later, on 10 October 1958, Zorlu returned to Strasbourg to address the Assembly again. This time, his remarks reflected growing geopolitical anxieties:

“The nations belonging to our community wish only to live in peace and quiet and hope to find common ground for agreement with other countries, provided that their independence and dignity are safeguarded. For that reason, we pay particular attention to any proposal from the East, which seems to us, if only in form, a positive proposal. How regrettable it is that every time we take up a proposal to bring about some relaxation of tension, we find ourselves faced by threats or we hear the cries of distress of some small nation which is being threatened and fears bondage! We have no other desire than to reach

Fatin Rüştü Zorlu,
Minister of Foreign
Affairs of Türkiye and
Chairman-in-Office
of the Committee
of Ministers of the
Council of Europe,
Strasbourg,
28 April 1958





agreement; but we find ourselves still compelled to maintain our independence and our liberty by force of arms and by a defensive strength greater than that of the opposite camp. [...] Europe is the chief centre of the free world's resistance to the danger of ideological oppression; indeed, it is its main bulwark. Those who seek the subjection of the free world are aware of the strength of this bulwark; they therefore seek to isolate us from other continents. If our weapons of defence are to be of service, it is essential that our links with the other continents be maintained. Events in the Middle and Far East should be considered from that aspect..."

At the time, the Turkish economy was already closely tied to Western Europe. Most of its trade was with the member states of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation. Türkiye's exports, largely agricultural products, reflected its predominantly agrarian economy, while the industrial sector contributed only modestly to national income. The idea of a free trade area was a key topic in 1950s Europe. Ankara advocated for the inclusion of agricultural products and supported differentiated treatment for developing economies such as its own.

The entry into force of the Treaty of Rome on 1 January 1958, signed by France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries, introduced new dynamics within Western Europe. The founding members of the European Economic Community came to be known as the "inner six" or the "rich club". Many parliamentarians in Strasbourg warned against the risk of this core group drifting away from the rest of Western Europe in economic, social, and defence matters. Zorlu, too, underscored in his 10 October 1958 speech that Türkiye supported a free trade area inclusive of all Council of Europe member states.

By January 1959, however, negotiations for a broader free trade area had stalled. The EEC's formation had disrupted the integration plans of other Western European countries not part of the inner six. On 21 January 1959, Turkish parliamentarian İsmail Şener (DP) expressed Ankara's growing unease before the Assembly:



“The first practical steps taken on 1 January 1959 to implement the Treaty of Rome, which brought into being the European Economic Community, and the failure so far to set up a free trade area or European Economic Association, despite all the efforts to do so, has been causing serious anxiety to the people of my country, Türkiye. Public opinion in Türkiye has always followed closely all moves towards the economic integration of Western Europe, because it is realised that political and military unification can only be achieved if, at the same time, there is strong economic solidarity among our nations. The Turkish Government has participated in the efforts aimed at creating a free trade area from the start and has attached the greatest importance to the scheme.”

That same day, Swedish parliamentarian Gunnar Heckscher, rapporteur of the Assembly’s Economic Committee on the proposed European Economic Association, offered his assessment. While countries like the United Kingdom and Sweden might withstand exclusion from the EEC, he warned, this was not the case for underdeveloped economies like Türkiye and Greece. These countries, not yet industrialised, risked being left behind. He argued that these countries would be the most severely affected if European integration stopped at the inner six. It was, he insisted, partly for their sake that integration efforts should extend beyond this core group, as the Council of Europe also included countries whose interests deserved full consideration. Heckscher called on the EEC to “not leave Greece and Türkiye in the lurch”, but also warned Athens and Ankara:

“I think it is necessary to say to the representatives of the underdeveloped countries—Greece and Türkiye in this case as it happens—that it is important that they should organise their economies to take account of the situation in which they live. Not only is it necessary for us to receive their exports; not only is it important for them to improve, with the development funds put at their disposal, the quality, for instance, of their cotton, but it is also important for them to see that the materials in respect of which they are increasing production are acceptable to the markets of the more developed countries. If, on the other hand, they try to do something else, that is, to develop production in



all cases similar to that which is taking place elsewhere, then I fail to see how they can ever overcome their problems.”

In July 1959, Türkiye shifted its position and applied for full membership in the EEC under Article 238 of the Treaty of Rome, which allowed for association agreements with third countries. Greece had submitted a similar application the month before. For both countries, the move was primarily economic. Their economies were deeply intertwined with those of the EEC member states, and exclusion from this evolving economic bloc was seen as untenable. Turkish exports to the inner six were already two and a half times greater than those to the so-called “outer seven” (Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). The EEC offered a much-needed market for Turkish and Greek goods.

The Council of Europe welcomed these applications. In a report adopted on 12 September 1959, the Parliamentary Assembly described the Greek and Turkish démarches as “an important diplomatic achievement” for the EEC.

Italian Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Alberto Folchi echoed this sentiment during the plenary debate on 16 September 1959:

“I would remind you that the Treaty of Rome expressly provides that any European country which so desires may be associated with the Community. At this very moment, requests for association submitted by Greece and Türkiye are being examined by the Community. That is yet further proof that the EEC is not a closed community, but that it tends towards expansion and intensification of international trade and economic, social and political co-operation, not only in Europe, but with the rest of the world, particularly with countries in the course of development. To these countries, the Community, with its high degree of industrialisation, can provide means of speeding their progress, and advantages and opportunities for development.”

The Council of Europe continued to support Türkiye’s integration into the EEC following the signing of the Ankara



Agreement in 1963. The Strasbourg-based organisation served as a catalyst in Türkiye's evolving relationship with the EEC and, later, the European Union. Had Türkiye not joined the Council of Europe in 1949 it is likely that its path towards economic association with Western Europe would have remained blocked. The Council of Europe provided both a political framework and a diplomatic platform for Türkiye's engagement with Europe's emerging economic institutions.

European defence

When the Council of Europe was founded, member states initially agreed not to discuss defence matters. Although some countries were hesitant to address such issues, the rapidly evolving international situation soon compelled the unique parliamentary forum of post-war Europe—Parliamentary Assembly—to confront them. The onset of the Cold War, the perceived threat of communism in Western Europe, and ultimately the outbreak of the Korean War made defence an unavoidable item on the Assembly's agenda from the early 1950s onward. Within the Council of Europe, debates extended beyond the scope of European integration to include the challenge of ensuring collective security. Many parliamentarians agreed that European reconstruction could not progress without a serious commitment to defence.

Among those who consistently raised the issue were British parliamentarians, particularly Winston Churchill, a fervent advocate of a "European army". On 11 August 1950, during a debate on a report prepared by the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly, Churchill delivered a stirring speech that underscored the urgency of the threat and the need for unity:

"There is no doubt that we are all of us in great danger. The freedom and civilization of Western Europe lie under the shadow of Russian communist aggression, supported by enormous armaments. The Soviet forces in Europe, measured in active divisions, in Air Force and in armoured vehicles, outnumber the forces of Western Union by at least six or seven to one. These are terrible facts, and it is a wonder that we are sitting here in our new House of Europe, calmly discussing our plans for the future happiness and concord of our peoples and their moral and cultural ideals. It is a wonder, but at least it is better than getting into a panic. The danger is, of course, not new. It was inherent in the fact that the free democracies of the West disarmed and dissolved their forces after the war,



Parliamentary
Assembly plenary
room, 1960s

while the dictatorship in the Kremlin maintained gigantic armies and laboured tirelessly by every means to re-equip them.”

Churchill urged the Western European nations to unite in their defence efforts:

“There must be created, and in the shortest possible time, a real defensive front in Europe. Great Britain and the United States must send large forces to the Continent. France must again revive her famous army. We welcome our Italian comrades. All –Greece, Türkiye, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Scandinavian States– must bear their share and do their best. Courage and unity must inspire us and direct the mighty energies at the disposal of our governments to solid and adequate measures of defence. Those who serve supreme causes must not consider what they can get but what they can give. Let that be our rivalry in these years that lie before us. The



question which challenges us is: shall we have the time? No one can answer that question for certain, but to assume that we are too late would be the very madness of despair. We are still under the shield of the atomic bomb, possessed in formidable quantities by the United States alone. The use of this weapon would shake the foundations of the Soviet regime throughout the vast areas of Russia, and the breakdown of all communications and centralised control might well enable the brave Russian peoples to free themselves from a tyranny far worse than that of the Tsars."

Churchill was also strongly in favour of including Germany in the Atlantic defence system. He argued that if a proper system could be established within two years, Western Europe would be able to match the Soviet Union's military strength. Accordingly, he presented a draft resolution calling for the creation of a united European army, in close co-operation with the United States and Canada. The draft resolution was adopted by a large majority: 89 votes in favour, 5 against, and 27 abstentions.

Although the Council of Europe's decision-making body, the Committee of Ministers, was not entirely supportive of the Assembly's engagement in defence matters, the topic remained on the Parliamentary Assembly's agenda. It returned to the floor in the plenary session of November 1950. While Britain and the United States supported the rearmament of Germany, France took a more cautious approach. French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, speaking before the Parliamentary Assembly on 24 November 1950 in Strasbourg, voiced his country's reservations:

"Germany is disarmed. To contemplate rearming Germany would be to contravene international commitments of the most precise and formal kind, which have never been in question hitherto. It would, moreover, have repercussions on the Eastern States, the extent of which we can barely conceive, and play into the hands of hostile propaganda by providing it with arguments which would be greatly prejudicial to ourselves."



Instead of directly rearming Germany, Schuman proposed integrating German forces into a new European army—placing Germany’s military capacity under shared European control. This reflected France’s deep trauma from two world wars and its reluctance to restore German military sovereignty.

Although many parliamentarians sympathised with France’s concerns, only Belgium and Luxembourg fully endorsed its position. Schuman’s proposal was subtle yet bold: France was ready to commit its own army to a supranational European structure. As he declared: “France, traditionally so attached to its army, so proud of that army, which had been the instrument of its unity and its integrity, and so often also the champion of idealism and of liberty, was ready to place that army at the disposal of Europe, to fuse it with a supranational organisation, without claiming any special privilege or reservation.”

Meanwhile, the United States, increasingly entangled in the Korean War, feared that the Eastern Bloc might attempt a similar incursion in Europe, particularly in German territory. This concern led Washington to push for the rearmament of West Germany as part of a wider Atlantic defence strategy. Schuman, however, warned that simply integrating Germany into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would not resolve the deeper political and structural issues—especially for countries not party to the Atlantic Alliance. He regarded a European army as a more stable and permanent solution.

To realise this vision, Schuman argued that member states would need to relinquish a portion of their national sovereignty to a collective European authority. This would be embodied in a European Minister or High Commissioner for Defence, operating under a Committee of Ministers. The supranational body would be tasked with recruiting, training, and maintaining the European army, as well as managing a shared defence budget. Its activities would be subject to oversight by a joint interparliamentary Assembly. In Schuman’s view, only such a structure could guarantee Europe’s long-term security—creating not merely a military alliance, but a common political destiny.



Türkiye, for its part, made clear its desire to join the Atlantic defence system through the speeches of its parliamentarians in Parliamentary Assembly. During the debate with Schuman, Turkish parliamentarian Osman Kapani articulated Türkiye's position in unequivocal terms:

"The defence of Europe forms a whole. The European Continent is both a Mediterranean and an Atlantic power. If today Europe has to face the communist threat, let us not forget that its frontiers are just as much in Berlin or on the Elbe as in Macedonia or Anatolia."

Kapani stressed that Turkish security was inseparable from European security. He challenged the Assembly with a rhetorical question: "Would you agree to seeing communist forces controlling the Straits, exerting their pressure suddenly on the whole of the Near East, on the Suez Canal, on your most direct lines of communication with those overseas countries with which you are so intimately associated?" Turning to the threat at the heart of Europe, he added: "If one day the waves of the Red Army surged over Berlin or Stockholm, I assure you—and I am convinced that I speak for all my people—that all Türkiye would be at one with you in your struggle."

Kapani underlined that Türkiye's participation in the Korean War was a clear demonstration of its commitment to the Western alliance. He called on Western nations to acknowledge and reciprocate this solidarity. Türkiye, he made clear, wished to join the Atlantic Pact. Kapani also expressed strong support for the proposed European army, viewing it as a vehicle for fostering both unity and security. He declared:

"We conceive this army as a force capable, at the first call of danger of coming to the aid of any nation which is a victim of aggression, whether our own, or Greece, or the gallant population of Berlin, or Sweden."

He envisioned this force not only as a shield for Europe but also as a guarantor of peace in the Near East. Ultimately, he believed the creation of a European army would open the way to deeper co-operation in essential areas such as transport, heavy industry, and agriculture—matters already



recognised by the Parliamentary Assembly as vital to Europe's long-term strength.

Another Turkish parliamentarian, Sadri Maksudi Arsal, also took the floor during the same plenary debate. A distinguished intellectual and statesman of Tatar origin, Arsal was one of the leading figures in the national awakening of the Tatars in early 20th-century Russia. He had a rich career as a writer, lawyer, politician, professor, and linguist, and served as a delegate to the League of Nations. After fleeing Bolshevik Russia, he lived in Western Europe before being invited by Atatürk to contribute to the academic and political life of the newly founded Republic of Türkiye. Drawing on his personal experience with both Eastern totalitarianism and Western democratic ideals, Arsal delivered a passionate speech warning against the threat of communism.

"Let us put things plainly: the danger is very great. A country armed to the teeth threatens Western civilization. What should we do? Everyone knows the answer, but no one dares say it: we must openly organize ourselves to face this danger. So long as Europe remains divided, nothing can be done. It is above all here, in this Assembly of the Representatives of the peoples, that we should come to an understanding on the urgent measures that must be taken; otherwise, this danger will only increase. This new imperialism, this new doctrine threatens Western Europe from two sides, from the East and from the South, but particularly from the South. We southerners will know to fight against this danger; we have been accustomed to fight it for centuries. If someone comes to our aid, we will try to forestall it. But if we, by ourselves, have not the power to prevent it, then, which God forbid, this imperialism will come down to the shores of the Mediterranean and will overwhelm the coasts of Africa. What will Europe do then? Even if Western Europe is by then unified it could only resist for a very little while. Ladies and gentlemen, it must be admitted that the danger is urgent and immediate. Only a coalition of all the nations of the South and the West can prevent its victory."

At the same time, Greece shared Türkiye's concerns and strategic position. Like Ankara, Athens sought to be part of



the Atlantic Pact, recognising the interconnectedness of regional security. However, when France initiated a conference aimed at exploring the creation of a European army, it notably excluded several Council of Europe member states, including Türkiye and Greece. This exclusion drew criticism from both governments. For Türkiye and Greece—countries on the frontlines of the Cold War’s southern flank—such decisions called into question the credibility of the collective defence project. Their frustration reflected a broader political debate within Western Europe over the scope, leadership, and inclusivity of emerging defence initiatives in the early 1950s.

Kasım Gülek, one of the most prominent figures of the Turkish delegation and an experienced politician, voiced strong criticism over Türkiye’s exclusion from recent discussions on European defence. When the Parliamentary Assembly convened on 7 May 1951 for a general debate, the defence issue was not formally on the agenda. However, Gülek raised the matter at the end of his speech, referring to the recent discussions on a European army:

“Last March, a meeting was called of certain countries to discuss this resolution on a European army. Certain countries in the Council of Europe were not invited to that meeting. I should like to know how this invitation came about. From where the inviting authorities derived their initiative and their authority?”

Gülek stressed Türkiye’s strategic importance and military capacity:

“Türkiye has today the most efficient and the strongest army in Europe. If the defence of Europe is to be considered as a whole – and I cannot conceive of any other way of viewing the defence of Europe – the country with the most efficient and the strongest army, which spends the greatest proportion of its national income on the maintenance of its army, should certainly have taken part in the deliberations.”

He concluded with a powerful call for unity and resolve, addressing the political leaders of Europe:

“Europe is being accused of moral weakness. Let us take steps to prove that this accusation is unfounded and that



Zeyyat Mandalinci,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
7 August 1950–
15 October 1956

Europe is determined to unite and to defend itself against outside aggression, and to promote its economic prosperity. In doing this, courage and audacity are needed by all of us. Courage and audacity are essential qualities of political leaders. You are the political leaders of your countries, and I remind you of the famous words of a great Frenchman, *'De l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace.'*"

With this reference to Georges Danton's revolutionary exhortation—"We must dare, and dare again, and go on daring!"—Gülek sought to inspire Europe to adopt a bold and inclusive approach, one that would embrace Türkiye as a full partner in the defence and future of the continent.

Another member of the Turkish delegation, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, also reacted strongly to Türkiye's exclusion from the discussions on a European army. A writer and journalist, Yalçın had witnessed the final years of the Ottoman Empire, supported the Turkish–German alliance during the First World War, and was later exiled by British troops occupying Istanbul. During the Parliamentary Assembly's plenary debate on 14 May 1951, where the political aspects of European defence were discussed, he criticised France for not inviting Türkiye to the conference on the formation of a European army. In his speech, Yalçın made a historical reference to Türkiye's position during the First World War:

"During the First World War, Türkiye was despised and rejected. It had applied both to France and England for permission to work with the Western world, but, as its death warrant had been signed, as everyone was in a hurry to share out the inheritance of the 'Sick Man of Europe', this request was rejected."



Yalçın warned that a similar error risked being repeated:

“Will the same mistake once more be made on the eve of a probable third world war? Will Türkiye be kept outside Europe and be compelled to take up a position of uncertainty?”

He underlined Türkiye’s peaceful foreign policy and its long-standing role as a regional stabiliser:

“Türkiye is satisfied with its frontiers. It has no territorial ambitions. Its aim is to be an element of stability and security in the Middle East. Türkiye was the first country to draw the attention of the world to the Bolshevik danger. The Turkish Army has for the last twelve years been kept on a war footing to protect its frontiers. By its firm and decisive attitude, Türkiye forms a barrier to the probable invasion by the Bolsheviks.”

Yalçın expressed astonishment at Türkiye’s exclusion and posed a direct question to the Assembly:

“This is the country that you wish to thrust aside from the ranks of those who are to defend Europe. How can the somewhat unfriendly attitude of France towards Türkiye on this matter be explained? Is it due to forgetfulness? That would be inconceivable! Some valid reason must be sought for the exclusion of Greece and Türkiye.”

In the same debate, another Turkish delegate, Zeyyat Mandalinci, also took the floor and reinforced Türkiye’s aspiration to join the Atlantic Pact. He clarified Türkiye’s motivation:

“Türkiye wished to join the Atlantic Treaty Organisation. This is a fact; arising rather from the desire to offer effective assistance to a free Europe and to the common cause than from the idea of receiving help from Europe.”

Turkish parliamentarians’ speeches would be echoed in the plenary. British Conservative member Harold Macmillan emphasised the necessity of conveying a “strong” message to the free world:

“Anyone who has heard the speeches of our Turkish friends, particularly the very serious statement made by Mr. Yalçın, can see how grave this problem is. Let it go out



from this Assembly, if nothing else goes out from here, that we are determined –whether in the framework of the North Atlantic Pact or in the framework of an Eastern Mediterranean defence system with France, Britain, Greece, Italy and Türkiye– that in one form or another, this gap will be filled, and that this Assembly representing European nations, is determined not to desert two of the most gallant and most determined nations of all Europe.”

Another British Conservative member, Duncan Sandys, presented a draft resolution on “European defence”. In his text, he suggested the inclusion of Türkiye and Greece in the Western defence system through an organisation to be created for Eastern Mediterranean defence or through an enlargement of the Atlantic Pact.

Following the earlier debates and the strong advocacy by Turkish parliamentarians, Türkiye and Greece continued their joint efforts within the Council of Europe to secure a place in NATO. On 10 December 1951, during a Parliamentary Assembly debate on the “objectives and perspectives of European policy”, the defence issue remained central to both Turkish and Greek representatives.

Greek member Leon Maccas voiced sharp criticism regarding the exclusion of Türkiye and Greece from the proposed European Army. He highlighted the ambiguity surrounding the integration of their forces, stating: “If I have understood rightly, and if I have correctly interpreted the speech made by Mr. Winston Churchill in the House of Commons last Thursday, the European army will constitute one portion of the Atlantic army, the other being the Anglo-American army.”

Maccas went on to explain the dilemma faced by his country and Türkiye:

“With regard to Greece—and I think Türkiye, too– the question is whether our armies are to be integrated into the Atlantic army directly or only indirectly being first integrated into the European army. This, I consider, must depend on two considerations, one military and the other political. If there is to be a geographical liaison between the Western front and the Balkan front, I think that one



could consider the merging of our armies in the European army, of which our troops would thus constitute the right wing. I made the same point last year when Mr. Winston Churchill, in his most eloquent vein, first raised the principle of a European army. But there are also political considerations to be taken into account. The French Government was no doubt motivated by such considerations when, a few months ago, it refrained from inviting Greece and Türkiye to take part in the initial discussions on the establishment of a European army. It will perhaps be similar considerations which will influence Greece to prefer its forces to be integrated directly into the Atlantic army."

Support for the inclusion of Türkiye and Greece in the European army continued to grow within the Assembly. Dutch Conservative parliamentarian Johannes Fens joined the voices criticising their exclusion, framing it as unjustified and politically shortsighted. He spoke out against what he called a "discrimination" towards the two countries:

"I shall only speak of those member states who wish to take part but who have not been invited to attend the negotiations now in progress about this army. I am referring to Greece and Türkiye. What an astonishing discrimination! These two countries have been invited to join NATO and have accepted."

Fens reminded the Assembly that already in May, he had advocated for the inclusion of Türkiye and Greece in the Paris Conference on the European army, but at that time, their non-membership in NATO had been cited as a reason for exclusion. "Now the situation has radically changed," he insisted, referring to the recent decision to admit both countries into NATO. He also countered possible objections regarding the geographic focus of the European army:

"If it were pointed out that the European army is not primarily concerned with the defence of the Mediterranean, I would retort that Italy, which will doubtless have a share in the defence of Mediterranean territory, is nevertheless participating in the European army."



Fens concluded by calling on the Western partners to swiftly invite Türkiye and Greece to the ongoing talks on the European army:

“In this way, rapid and effective integration will be secured as soon as these two countries have been admitted to NATO. Europe has now begun to construct the dyke which is to protect us against the red flood. This dyke we must all build together and with all speed, in a spirit of unity. May its builders fully realise that on this unanimity and this speed will depend the lives of the men, women and children who live behind the dyke!”

Despite initial objections from the United States and the United Kingdom, and differing perspectives within Western Europe, Türkiye and Greece officially joined NATO on 18 February 1952. That same year, on 27 May, six Western European countries—France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg—signed the European Defence Community (EDC) Treaty, aiming to establish a supranational European army. However, the treaty quickly became a source of political controversy in France, triggering an intense national debate over sovereignty.

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, the rise of Nikita Khrushchev, and the end of the Korean War, the perceived urgency of the communist threat—previously a major argument for the EDC—began to weaken. French politicians grew divided. Despite pressure from the United States, which threatened to review its aid to France if the treaty was not ratified, opposition to the EDC gained ground. Charles de Gaulle aligned himself with those who feared a loss of French autonomy, and the influential newspaper *Le Monde* became a prominent platform for anti-EDC sentiment.

On 30 August 1954, the French National Assembly rejected the treaty. A project that France had once championed diplomatically was now buried by its own parliament. With the treaty’s failure to obtain French ratification, the ambitious plan for a European army collapsed. In its aftermath, it was agreed that the Federal



Republic of Germany would regain control of its own military and join NATO—a major strategic shift in post-war European security.

The rejection of the EDC marked a significant setback for advocates of a federal Europe. Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgium's Foreign Minister, underscored this in a speech before the Parliamentary Assembly plenary on 21 October 1955. Reflecting on the consequences of the French vote, he declared:

"The rejection of the European Defence Community did not merely mark the end of a military scheme. Unfortunately, as many of us have repeated in this Assembly, it marked the end—though I trust only provisionally—of the conception of a European policy exemplified by the proposed European Defence Community."

Cold War analysis

Following the Second World War, the Council of Europe was established by the liberal democracies of Western Europe as a political and ideological counterweight to the Eastern Bloc. As such, the Cold War remained a central concern of the Council of Europe—especially during its first two decades, from 1950 to 1970. All member states shared a consensus on the need for collective resistance to the perceived “threat of communism”. Anti-communist and anti-Soviet rhetoric became commonplace not only within national politics, but also in the internal debates of the Council of Europe itself.

On 17 September 1953, the Parliamentary Assembly held a debate under the title “Definition of the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation”. The rapporteur was Paul-Henri Spaak, the former Belgian Prime Minister and the first President of the Parliamentary Assembly (1949–1951). In presenting his report, Spaak delivered a stark assessment of the Soviet threat:

“Communism is sometimes presented as simply a political party to the left of Socialism. Nothing could be further from the truth. If communism were merely the expression of extremist political aspirations, if the question of whether one is for or against communism could be reduced to the discussion of certain economic systems and certain social problems, it would be possible to be satisfied with simply being for or against. In that case, the struggle against communism would be nowhere as important as it is in the world today. The truth is that communism aspires to be much more than a political party. It aspires to be a new civilisation, which is completely and unalterably opposed to Western civilisation. It has none of the great Western traditions; it has inherited neither the wisdom and beauty of Greece, nor the unflinching quality of the Roman, nor the eternal momentum of Christianity, nor the wisdom and tolerance of humanism, nor the idealism of the



Declaration of Human Rights. There is no current of Western thought to which communism can be linked. Communist thought is simply the expression of pure materialism, withering, metallic and parched. We must understand that we are facing not the representatives of another political party, but men who have upset all the values in which we believe – not only all political values, but also all philosophical and moral values.”

The debate continued during a subsequent plenary sitting on 21 September 1953. Taking the floor, Turkish parliamentarian Osman Kapani underlined Türkiye’s frontline position in the global confrontation with the Soviet Union. He reminded the Assembly that Türkiye had been one of the earliest targets of Soviet geopolitical pressure:

“Türkiye was one of the first countries to be affected by the ‘Cold War.’ As early as 1945, the Soviet Union laid violent claim to the villages of Kars, Ardahan, and Erzurum in northeastern Anatolia. Using methods now all too familiar, they fabricated pseudo-scientific arguments for annexation, allegedly based on ethnological data—though these must have been of remote origin, since the Turks had inhabited these villages for a thousand years. It was clear that the true objective of this pressure was to obtain concessions in the Dardanelles.”

Kapani stressed Türkiye’s uncompromising response to Soviet demands: “Türkiye’s answer was a categorical refusal, and she has remained firm despite all subsequent provocations. Today, Russia has shifted from threats to honeyed words. Although it no longer voices territorial claims, its intentions regarding the Straits remain unchanged.”

He warned that, despite the softened rhetoric from the Soviet Union, Türkiye remained steadfast and alert:

“The NATO countries need have no qualms about Türkiye’s reaction to this gentler behaviour on the part of the Russian bear. The Soviet retraction of claims over the villages must be seen as a triumph of Turkish diplomacy, and we do not despair of a similar reversal in Soviet aims concerning the



Straits. The Montreux Convention provides for a revision procedure every five years, which Russia, as a signatory, could invoke in 1956. Through that process, any claims would need to be submitted to all co-signatories.”

He concluded with a cautionary note, underscoring the continuity of Soviet objectives despite tactical shifts:

“There is still nothing to suggest that the aims of Soviet strategy have changed—only the tactics. And since the goals of the free world, so clearly defined in President Eisenhower’s great policy speech, remain more valid than ever, we must not weaken our defensive posture. In diplomatic negotiation, strength is our greatest asset. Soviet leaders are realists; they have their methods, as Mr. Spaak has shown so clearly in his report. If they now seek a relaxation of tensions and a pause in the Cold War, it is only because they need it—and are prepared to pay the price.”

While member states of the Council of Europe broadly agreed on the importance of countering communism, they did not always share a unified strategy. These differences became increasingly evident during pivotal moments of the Cold War. One such moment came on 24 January 1967, when West German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Willy Brandt addressed the Parliamentary Assembly. His appearance, at the Assembly’s invitation, was both symbolic and politically significant, as the policy of *détente* had begun to reshape the landscape of European diplomacy. For Brandt and the Federal Republic of Germany, European integration was inseparable from the question of East–West reconciliation. Bonn openly advocated a more pragmatic approach to the Eastern Bloc, seeking improved bilateral relations.

In his speech, Brandt emphasised that *détente* was not a utopian aspiration, but a practical means of navigating East–West tensions:

“Détente is no magic word. The idea itself does not mean the disappearance of the tensions and conflicts between East and West. It is policy in the sense that it involves a tussle between conflicting aims and interests with a view



to affecting a compromise. Secondly, *détente* is not something with a purpose of its own. No, the object is to make possible a compromise of conflicting interests such as may supply the basis for a lasting system of peace in Europe. It is not synonymous with capitulation, it does not imply a flight from reality, but it is an attempt to find, increasingly, spheres of common interest where co-operation is possible. Thirdly, *détente* is a complex concept. Naturally, there can be no question of solving all our problems. A beginning must be made where there are possibilities. Small steps forward maybe, where big steps are not yet possible. But our eyes must be all the time directed to achieving results of a more substantial character."

Brandt then outlined the federal government's objectives under this policy:

"The federal government intends to make its contribution to *détente* in Europe. The problems of Europe, like those of Germany, simply cannot be settled in a 'cold war' atmosphere. We are therefore striving for an overall improvement of our relations with all the East European States. Our purpose is comprehensive exchanges in matters of trade and in scientific and cultural affairs. We hope to be able to establish diplomatic relations. We have initiated various talks and negotiations and soon we shall be getting to the point of personal contacts with representatives of East European Governments."

Crucially, Brandt linked the vision of European peace with the long-term goal of German reunification. For him, this was not an imminent political demand, but a historical aspiration anchored in European stability:

"The division of Europe has left its own mark on the fate of Germany. We, who today are responsible for German policy, are anxious to devote our whole energies to finding a policy that will put an end to this division and lay the foundations of a stable and peaceful order in Europe. However, a stable and peaceful order in Europe also implies, I am convinced, a united Germany. History has taught us that enforced partition cannot destroy a nation's will to unity. Our East European neighbours have furnished



many proofs of this. [...] Let me say with necessary honesty: German unity remains our goal. Still, I hope I have made it quite clear that, for us, it is a goal which we do not expect to attain in the short term and without opposition. In addition, it is a goal that is not directed against the interests of any other nation, but one that we must strive to reach with the agreement of our friends, our allies and our neighbours. Finally, it is a goal which we shall achieve only if it is congruent with the well-being of our continent, if it can bridge the gulf that today divides East from West, and if it contributes to the evolution of a Europe which is a decisively important and intrinsic factor in world peace.”

For Brandt, Germany had historically served as a “bridge” between Eastern and Western Europe—a role he believed West Germany could reclaim. Yet West Germany was not alone in seeking improved relations with the Eastern Bloc, particularly with the Soviet Union. Türkiye, too, gradually shifted its tone. By the late 1960s, Ankara had begun to move away from the rigid anti-communism of the 1950s and towards a more balanced approach aligned with the broader European policy of *détente*.

Following Willy Brandt’s speech, a general debate was held on the “General policy of the Council of Europe.” Coşkun Kırca (CHP), a Turkish parliamentarian, took the floor and addressed the evolving policy of *détente*:

“My country, Türkiye, followed the road most of her friends and allies are taking when, about three years ago, closer relations were established between Türkiye and the Soviet Union. That policy, which was first motivated by the Republican People’s Party to which I belong, was soon taken up by the other large political group, which is now in power, the Justice Party. Thanks to that policy, a *détente* really exists between the two neighbours, and fruitful co-operation continues to develop between them particularly in the technical and commercial fields and in economic aid.”

While this co-operation was partly driven by the general climate of *détente*, Kırca insisted that other factors also played a role:



"In my country, which, since the end of the Second World War, has been regarded as the steadfast bastion of the West, the public are beginning today to toy with the idea of neutrality. This is not because of any sudden reversal of the values to which the vast majority of the Turkish people remain deeply attached. The great moral values of European civilisation, which are precisely those the Council of Europe symbolises and defends, are always venerated in Türkiye. This urge for neutrality, which is so detrimental to the vital interests both of Türkiye and of Europe and the West, is developing because of unfortunate circumstances thoughtlessly created by the policy of certain of our Allies."

The principal ally that Kırca alluded to, was the United States. He expressed frustration at what he saw as Western indifference to Turkish concerns, especially regarding the Cyprus issue:

"The Turkish people cannot indefinitely remain indifferent to the fact that of all the Great Powers, the only one which has up to now expressed an opinion more or less in line with Türkiye's on the final solution of the Cyprus problem is the Soviet Union, whereas our Atlantic allies and our European friends remain practically dumb in the face of the innumerable breaches of treaties solemnly entered into, and are even more so when it comes to saying anything at all about seeking a compromise."

Kırca continued with a stark warning, reflecting growing disillusionment among Turkish public opinion:

"On this point, the Turkish people are incapable of understanding the persistent silence of their friends and allies, since they must realise that the balance achieved in 1923, with so much difficulty, wisdom and justice, between the Turkish and Greek populations and interests by the Treaty of Lausanne cannot be altered unilaterally, and that any future new statute must respect this absolute principle of an overall balance, that no compromise is possible until the benefits of self-administration and—if that is still insisted on—self-determination are extended to all the national communities which inhabit the Island of Cyprus."



He concluded with a pointed warning, underscoring the urgency of Western engagement:

"I must repeat again that the West, and especially Europe, must take some immediate action in this direction if they want to prevent a serious change of heart among the Turkish people. It is a matter of urgency that everything possible should be done to bring back to vigorous life the Turkish people's former faith in Europe and the West."

One and a half years after this debate, Turkish Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil addressed the Assembly in Strasbourg on 7 May 1968. *Détente* remained a central theme in his speech, and on this issue, Turkish and West German diplomats appeared to share a remarkably similar outlook. Outlining Türkiye's vision, Çağlayangil declared:

"We note with satisfaction the continuing expansion of East–West relations and the growth of what is known as the atmosphere of *détente*. Speaking for my own country, we are doing our best to contribute to this development and we have succeeded, within a very short space of time, in expanding considerably our relations with both the Soviet Union and the other countries of Eastern Europe on the basis of a sound concept of good neighbourliness and our mutual interests. We attach special importance to our relations with the Balkan countries, and we trust that the whole of that region may now look forward to a time of peace, harmony and fruitful co-operation."

He went on to underline that this momentum should serve a deeper European purpose:

"In the next few years, Europe will be extending her search for means of healing her divisions in such a way as to guarantee the security of all countries and to bring peace and general progress not only to Europe, but to the whole world. Today's political *détente* in Europe should be regarded as a stepping-stone to further efforts to find a solution to the problems now dividing our continent. It is only by rediscovering a unity, based on security and justice for every European nation, that Europe herself will ever find the lasting peace she craves and be able to play her full part in a constantly changing world. [...] It seems to me



İhsan Sabri
Çağlayangil (left),
Turkish Minister of
Labour, meeting
Pierre Pflimlin,
President of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
during Türkiye's
Chairmanship of
the Committee of
Ministers, Strasbourg,
27 September 1965

to be the duty of all of us who are convinced Europeans, who sincerely feel ourselves to be members of the European family, to consider what, either as individuals or as a community, we have to contribute, in the way of influence or even, I would say, responsibility, at this critical moment of history."

In the ensuing plenary debate, Nihat Erim (CHP), another Turkish parliamentarian, took the floor to offer his view:

"The Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries are to some extent entitled to demand guarantees for their security. One way in which this demand might be met



would be by way of a reciprocal agreement to renounce the use of force, backed by a guarantee from the United States and certain other European countries. [...] We are going through a period of transition leading on towards European unification, and we must not abandon our ideals simply because, for example, the expansion of the Communities is being delayed by the veto of one of their members and sometimes seems to be encountering fresh difficulties every day. Scientific and technological progress is pushing us all towards unification and integration, not in Europe only but throughout the world. When I talk of integration, I am not thinking simply of Europe, being no supporter of the idea that the object of a united Europe is to be able to stand up to the United States or the Soviet Union. What I look forward to is an increasingly all-embracing integration, born of the fact that scientific and technical progress is daily prompting all peoples to integrate on a wider basis than they have ever known before."

Yet the cautious optimism surrounding *détente* was soon shaken. In August 1968, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia abruptly ended the Prague Spring and cast a long shadow over East–West rapprochement. The tone of speeches at the Council of Europe changed almost immediately.

During a plenary debate on 23 September 1968, Turkish delegate Yüksel Menderes (DP) expressed deep disillusionment:

"The occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and its allies constitutes, and will always constitute, a very grave violation of the independence of nations and of personal freedom itself. Once again, the Russian attack has shown clearly and unmistakably how derisory were the hopes based on a change in the policy of the USSR and of some of its satellites. Today, these tragic events have unquestionably destroyed the belief of those who thought that the Soviet Union had set forth on the path of liberalisation, and that this path would make it possible to reduce the structural differences that exist between the



Yücel Menderes
(seat 114), Member
of the Parliamentary
Assembly,
24 January 1966–
17 April 1970



democratic countries and the totalitarian communist countries.”

For Menderes, the implications were clear:

“The occupation of Czechoslovakia has likewise demonstrated that Europe must continue to live in the existing conditions, and that nothing has changed in communist methods since Russia crushed the Hungarian popular movement in 1956. In this connection [...] in my opinion, one very important conclusion emerges from this brutal attack: the Western world must not weaken, and has no right to weaken, the Atlantic Alliance.”

Despite these setbacks, East–West relations remained a permanent fixture in the Parliamentary Assembly debates. Meanwhile, countries behind the Iron Curtain increasingly called for European co-operation and security. In 1966, the Warsaw Pact countries expressed at Bucharest their desire to convene a European security conference, reiterating the call in Budapest in 1969. Initially, they demanded the exclusion of West Germany from Western alliances—a condition they later dropped.



The Council of Europe became the first Western European forum to openly debate these appeals. On 29 January 1970, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution calling for one or more conferences on European security, the advancement of *détente*, and East–West dialogue. These efforts laid the groundwork for what would become the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), whose preparatory phase began three years later.

During the debate preceding the resolution, Turkish parliamentarian Reşat Zaloğlu (AP) stated:

“We in Türkiye, who are Russia’s neighbours, are bound up with the destinies of Eastern Europe and perfectly willing to maintain peaceful, neighbourly relations with the peoples of Eastern Europe and to take part in commercial, cultural and other exchanges with them. [...] It is in the interests of our countries to provide people living in the states of Eastern Europe with all possible moral support. I am thinking of the European Security Conference. My country is in favour of participating in an enlarged Europe in the service of peace. Even if the European Security Conference yielded only modest results, these would nevertheless greatly contribute, without any doubt whatsoever, to the relaxation of tensions between the states and peoples of Eastern and Western Europe.”

On 25 January 1971, the Parliamentary Assembly held an extraordinary plenary debate on East–West dialogue. Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, invited as guest speaker, supported the creation of a specialised Council of Europe body on East–West co-operation. He observed:

“The relations of the Council of Europe and its member states with the Eastern European States have been repeatedly discussed in this Assembly, precisely because this is a matter which exercises European public opinion, parliamentarians and governments. Thus, after an instructive debate last September, the Assembly recommended that the Committee of Ministers continue to consider East–West relations and preparations for one or more European Security Conferences as well as the idea of setting up a permanent body to that end, and the special part that might be played by the Council of Europe.



[...] The story goes that Stalin once asked sneeringly how many divisions the Pope had. The Council of Europe has no divisions either. Its significance lies in its wealth of creative ideas regarding European co-operation and its ability to render them acceptable to the governments of the member states.”

The Parliamentary Assembly continued to play a significant role in East–West dialogue in the final years of the Cold War. It fostered institutional contacts with Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Bulgaria, and the German Democratic Republic.

In 1988, the Parliamentary Assembly invited a delegation from the Supreme Soviet to Strasbourg. The following year, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev delivered a landmark speech to the Assembly on 6 July 1989 presenting his vision of a “Common European Home”. That same year, the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly held its first meeting in an Eastern Bloc country—Hungary. Even after the Cold War formally ended, the Parliamentary Assembly played a pivotal role by engaging with Central and Eastern European countries and supporting their political and institutional preparations for European Union membership.

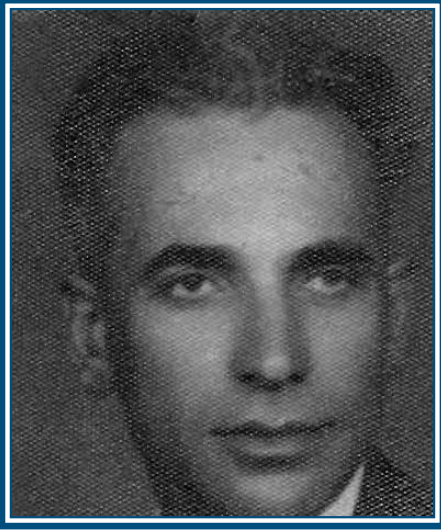
Türkiye's support for Germany's admission to the Council of Europe

The early reintegration of Germany into the post-war European order is often attributed to the foresight of statesmen in Washington, London, or Paris. Far less known — but no less vital — was the decisive support voiced by Turkish parliamentarians at the Council of Europe. At a time when the scars of war were still raw and many in Western Europe remained wary of Germany's return, Türkiye emerged as one of its boldest advocates.

From the very first days of the Council of Europe, Turkish parliamentarians voiced their support for Germany's inclusion—most clearly during the inaugural plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly on 17 August 1949, in the debate on changes in the political structure of Europe. Presiding over the sitting was the French parliamentarian François de Menthon, who gave the floor to Tahsin Bekir Balta (CHP), a Turkish lawyer and intellectual who had pursued part of his university education in Germany. At a moment when reconciliation with the former Axis powers was still controversial, Balta delivered a strikingly forward-looking appeal: he called for both Germany and Austria to be welcomed into the new European project.

For Balta, the Council of Europe could not truly embody unity and co-operation if it excluded key parts of the continent. He declared:

"As our object is the union of all the countries of Europe, our organisation should be open to all the countries of Europe that wish to cooperate, who can collaborate with us in our common task, and share our ideas on essential political principles. I am thus in complete agreement with those representatives who have mentioned Western Germany and Austria as countries whose earliest possibly participation in our organisation is in every respect desirable."



Tahsin Bekir Balta,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
from 13 August 1949
to 7 August 1950

From 1949 onward, Turkish parliamentarians consistently supported the membership of Germany and Austria in the Council of Europe — often with more enthusiasm than their Western European counterparts. Germany signed and ratified the Statute of the Council of Europe on 13 July 1950, becoming a member of the organisation on the same day. Less than a year later, on 5 May 1951, German parliamentarians took their seats in the Parliamentary Assembly for the first time. The first welcoming statements regarding Germany's presence in a Parliamentary Assembly plenary sitting came from the Turkish delegation.

As rapporteur of the Credentials Committee for that session, Turkish parliamentarian Kasım Gülek took a procedural initiative to address the Assembly on the arrival of the German delegation. Submitting a point of order during the opening of the plenary session, he requested to speak on a matter not listed on the official agenda. Once President Paul-Henri Spaak granted him the floor, Gülek rose and declared:

"I should like to say a few words of welcome to the German Representatives in the Assembly of the Council of Europe. This is indeed a historic occasion on which the German Federal Republic takes its place among us as a fully-fledged member. There can indeed be no union of Europe without Germany, just as it is inconceivable that there should be a Germany outside the union of Europe. It is my hope that a free, democratic and unified Germany will be a factor of peace and prosperity in Europe. I hope also that other European countries, which should be among us but which for the moment cannot be, may participate in the Council of Europe in the very near future."

Following Gülek's speech, the head of the German delegation, Christian Democrat parliamentarian Hermann Pünder, requested the floor. With a shaky voice, he expressed:



"On behalf of my German colleagues, I wish to extend our sincere thanks to the Turkish Representative for the kind words regarding Germany's admission to the Council of Europe. Although there is not complete unanimity within Germany in favour of joining the Council of Europe, we are united in the belief that Germany's future must lie within the framework of the European community."

On 11 December 1951, the Assembly unanimously adopted a report and resolution requesting the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to take the first appropriate opportunity to invite Austria to become a member of the Organisation. Before the vote, Kasım Gülek once again took the floor to express his support for Austria's accession:

"I should like to heartily endorse the draft resolution inviting Austria to become a Member of the Council of Europe. Austria is a natural member of the European community, and the Committee of Ministers is to be congratulated for initiating this step. I sincerely hope that Austria's accession will soon be realised, as it would symbolise the Council of Europe's ambition to incorporate all of Europe. Whenever an opportunity arises to include another country, we will welcome it with open arms."

However, despite the Assembly's call for Austrian membership, domestic challenges prevented Austria from joining the Council of Europe until 16 April 1956.

Turkish parliamentarians continued to express strong support for Germany even after its accession to the Council of Europe in 1951. One such voice was Ziyad Ebüzziya (DP), who on 7 December 1951 spoke during the Parliamentary Assembly debate on the problem of refugees and over-population. He praised Germany's post-war efforts to accommodate and integrate its displaced population:

"The number of refugees in Germany amounts at present to ten million. This astronomical figure represents 20 percent of the entire population of the Federal Republic. Despite her immense post-War difficulties, Germany, to her credit, has succeeded in assimilating 30 percent of this figure into her national economy in a record space of time.



This phenomenon should not be allowed to go unmentioned, and in my capacity as a European I should like here to express publicly my gratitude to Germany for this immense achievement. Nevertheless, there are, unfortunately, still three million refugees who have been unable to find more than temporary work in that country—and four million who have found no work at all! To expect Germany to settle this problem alone is, if not unjust, at all events asking the impossible, especially as it should not be forgotten that one million and a half to two million refugees are entering the West from the East every year, whereas emigration is going on at the ridiculous rate of 30 000 a year.”

Turkish support extended beyond humanitarian admiration to matters of European security and integration. Just three days later, on 10 December 1951, Kasım Gülek addressed the plenary once again — this time on the issue of Germany’s participation in European defence, particularly within the framework of a European army:

“The formation of a European army seems to be the happiest solution allowing for the participation of Germany in a European union. It provides further cause for the question to be taken seriously, and a solution found. Indeed, the defence of Europe is not possible without the participation of Germany. A free democratic Germany should take its place in the defence of our Continent. If the setting up of a European army is the only way by which Germany can take part in the defence of our Continent, then this question takes on additional importance. [...] Today, we Representatives to the Council of Europe have a great responsibility. We have to decide on the union of Europe, even if it be on a somewhat limited scale. Coming generations, in whose hands we shall leave the future of Europe, are looking to us; our peoples in our respective countries are looking to this Assembly for decisions. This may be our last chance to take a definite step towards the union of Europe through defence.”

On 27 September 1952, during a plenary debate on European defence, another Turkish parliamentarian, Zeyyat Mandalinci (DP), voiced strong support for Germany’s military integration into Western defence structures:



"A strong Germany can supply the necessary ballast for the whole ship of Europe. If ever we set out to sea without it, we shall certainly founder. If Germany is given an opportunity to play an honourable role, Europe's equilibrium can be restored. That is why I genuinely rejoice at the integration of Germany into the European Defence Community, for it constitutes a highly important guarantee of European peace. I shall also be happy to learn someday soon that Germany is to be integrated into NATO."

His remarks reflected a broader conviction shared by many Turkish parliamentarians at the time: that Germany's involvement in European defence was not merely inevitable, but essential for ensuring peace and stability across the continent. Even when hopes were dashed by the French National Assembly's rejection of the European Defence Community treaty on 30 August 1954, Turkish voices in Strasbourg did not waver. They continued to advocate for Germany's place within the Western defence architecture, firmly convinced that lasting peace in Europe could not be achieved without it.

On 17 September 1954, during a plenary debate on the definition of the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation, Nadir Nadi, an independent Turkish member of the Assembly, took the floor to defend the necessity of a German contribution to European security:

"The security of the West requires a German contribution to common defence, and this entails the restoration of German independence and the restitution of her armed forces. The German military contribution would enable the West to stand up to the communist danger."

In Nadi's view, Germany should no longer be regarded as a threat to France or other Western countries. Rather, he underscored that genuine reconciliation between France and Germany was indispensable for global peace:

"Mutual trust between French and German peoples is the sine qua non of world peace. A Europe in which France and Germany were finally reconciled, in which they looked



upon themselves as two provinces, as it were, of a single country, in which the two great partners understood and shouldered each other's hardships, such a Europe would be cured forever of the disease which has slowly been killing it for many a long year. Never has there been such a favourable opportunity of inspiring confidence between France and Germany."

When the session resumed on 20 September, Zeyyat Mandalinci once again addressed the Assembly. Echoing his earlier intervention, he urged the other member states not to treat Germany unfairly or with suspicion:

"Never in its history has Germany lived through such unhappy times as it does today. Having suffered defeat and destruction, its only wish is for peace. It is hopeful of its future, and its every action reflects a genuine desire for peace. It must not be slighted and driven to desperation by futile and humiliating mistrust, for in the long run, humiliation always wounds the most noble and peace-loving of peoples and may well, indeed, engender rancour. That is where dictators come onto the scene. That is why Hitler was a product of Versailles. We must not repeat that mistake and breed a new Hitler. Let us extend the hand of friendship to Germany and forget those vile wars, for which we must all accept some measure of responsibility. Let us bury the past with its unpleasant memories to avoid the many even more unpleasant prospects which the future seems to hold in store for us."

Verbatim records of the Assembly reveal that Turkish, German, and Austrian parliamentarians maintained warm and constructive relations throughout the post-war decades, particularly up to the 1980s. One illustrative example of this mutual respect and solidarity emerged during a plenary debate on 24 September 1970, held under the agenda item "The General Policy of the Council of Europe." The Assembly was considering a report and draft resolution authored by Austrian Social Democrat Karl Czernetz.

Among the speakers was Turkish parliamentarian Aydın Yalçın (AP), who voiced concern over the report's failure to mention Türkiye's relationship with the European



Economic Community, despite discussing the cases of Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Yalçın's tone was measured, though the emotion in his voice hinted at deeper frustration:

"I am far from feeling angry with the Rapporteur or thinking that he may be trying to put obstacles on Türkiye's path to Europe, as his country has done in the past," he said. "Turks are now far from coming to Europe in the manner that the Janissaries had hoped. On the contrary, historically speaking, we feel great respect for and even gratitude to our Austrian friends. In the second siege of Vienna, they made us aware that a universe confined to the Eastern world is not enough for the survival of the Turkish nation. Austrians, particularly from among all European nations, have made Turks more European, in the sense that we Turks of the new generation have been brought up in the tradition of real Europeanisation."

Yalçın continued by placing Türkiye's European identity within a historical and philosophical framework:

"In our cultural history, Europeanisation is an important concept. The nations of Europe, after years of experience in the Council of Europe, have recently started talking about Europeanisation—but we Turks, in our cultural history, began talking about it much earlier than all European countries. Because of the comparative outlook on world civilisation, we became aware of the importance of the universality of Europeanisation."

He concluded with a strong affirmation of Türkiye's place in Europe:

"Türkiye, with her outlook, her dynamic economy, her Western-oriented cultural life, her economic and political stability, and her love for freedom, democracy and the parliamentary system, would be extremely dismayed to see Europe ignoring the existence of such an effective, dynamic and willing partner of a future European society."

Czernetz's response was thoughtful and laced with both clarity and wit. He began by addressing the omission of Türkiye in the report's section on European integration, explaining that Türkiye's association agreement with the EEC had already been in place for four years:



Council of Europe
building, 1960s

“Türkiye is not mentioned in the part of the report dealing with integration because, it appears to me, that they have had a treaty of association with the EEC for four years. There is a problem; it concerns the realisation of a treaty of association; there are no obstacles in the way.”

He contrasted this with the case of Greece, where democratic shortcomings had sparked debates about the possible suspension of its association with the Community:

“In the European Parliament, discussions are now being held on the extent to which the Greek treaty of association should be suspended. The democratic Turkish nation has no such problems; therefore, no mention of any has been made.”

Turning directly to Yalçın, Czernetz added with a smile:

“Dear Mr Yalçın, believe me, I am not a descendant of Prince Eugene of Savoy, and I shall not hinder the Turks on their move to Europe. Not only have we taken coffee from



the Turks after their siege of Vienna — which we should not like to give back — but also, as you rightly said, you have acquired a certain Europe-mindedness.”

He concluded on a note of shared destiny and mutual recognition:

“Since that time, much understanding for the East, the Balkan States and for the Orient in general. We are well aware that Türkiye is an essential part of Europe, and that Europe can no more exist without Türkiye than without France, England or Germany, without Italy or Austria. Pray will the others excuse me. Europe’s free nations constitute the community of free Europe; they are, in our time, the champions and pioneers of an all-European union in the future!”

Türkiye: creator of a Europe without borders

Today, Turkish citizens must obtain visas to travel to most European countries—a process that is often costly, time-consuming, and frustrating. And yet, it might come as a surprise to many that Türkiye was not only once exempt from such restrictions, but was, in fact, among the European countries that helped lay the very foundations of what we now call “visa-free Europe.”

Yes, you read that correctly.

Long before the Schengen Agreement came into being, the idea of abolishing visa requirements within Europe was first seriously debated in Strasbourg—not in the 1980s or 1990s, but as early as 1951. And Türkiye, a founding member of the Council of Europe, was part of those pioneering discussions. This now-forgotten chapter is as ironic as it is significant: a country that once championed border-free travel in Europe has, over time, found itself increasingly fenced off from the very continent it helped to open.

During a Parliamentary Assembly plenary debate on the removal of customs barriers and trade restrictions in Europe, held on 6 December 1951, Italian parliamentarian and Vice-President of the Assembly Stefano Jacini introduced a motion titled *Suppression of Entry Visa Formalities in Respect of Nationals of Members of the Council of Europe*. While the broader session addressed complex economic issues, Jacini drew attention to a “minor point” that could be resolved more swiftly: the simplification of frontier formalities for ordinary travellers. Describing visa controls as “vexatious and useless”, he criticised the practice of waking passengers just to stamp passports—procedures which, he argued, did little for security but a lot to employ people doing meaningless work. Though he did not propose abolishing passports altogether, Jacini’s pointed and ironic remarks were an early and forceful plea for freer movement in post-war Europe.



Jacini's motion was met with enthusiasm. In the early 1950s, when the pain of war was still fresh, any proposal offering a practical route towards European reconciliation and integration was warmly welcomed. Visa-free travel was not just a technical matter—it symbolised a new trust between nations. The Parliamentary Assembly assigned the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions to prepare a report on the subject, and a lively debate began to unfold.

Turkish parliamentarians were actively engaged in this debate. Having joined the Council of Europe in 1949, Türkiye was keen to demonstrate its European credentials, and the idea of facilitating mobility across borders aligned well with Ankara's broader vision for European integration. For Türkiye, participation in such initiatives was more than symbolic; it was strategic. It allowed Turkish voices to shape the early architecture of continental co-operation—an opportunity they seized with consistency and conviction.

The issue also gained traction among the Council of Europe's decision-makers. Support for eliminating travel visas between member states was, remarkably, unanimous within the Committee of Ministers. On 19 March 1952, the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation that laid the groundwork for the eventual removal of visa requirements—primarily through a series of bilateral agreements. The shared objective was clear: to ease travel and foster a sense of European unity by enabling the free movement of people.

Meanwhile, at the Parliamentary Assembly, British parliamentarian Montgomery Hyde was appointed rapporteur by the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions. His report, entitled *Simplification of Frontier Formalities for Travellers*, was published on 9 May 1953. Hyde noted that several Council of Europe members—including Germany, Greece, and Türkiye—still maintained visa requirements for travellers from other member states. However, he also acknowledged Türkiye's constructive approach: it had already signed bilateral agreements with Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom to eliminate visa formalities, and



had expressed its readiness to negotiate similar arrangements with other countries. Far from resisting the idea of a borderless Europe, Türkiye was quietly helping to build it—one agreement at a time.

The Parliamentary Assembly discussed the report and its draft recommendation in a plenary debate held on 23 September 1953. The sitting was presided over by Parliamentary Assembly Vice-President Osman Kapani, a Turkish parliamentarian. Kapani introduced the debate on visa liberalisation and then invited the rapporteur, Montgomery Hyde, to speak.

In his address to the Assembly, Hyde made a compelling case for eliminating visa requirements and simplifying customs checks among Council of Europe member states. These measures, he argued, were not merely bureaucratic inconveniences but outdated barriers that disrupted the daily lives of countless travellers. To illustrate the absurdity of current practices, he recounted his own experience travelling on the Orient Express from Paris to Istanbul: “I must say that the documentation connected with currency control has, in my opinion, now reached most alarming proportions”, he told the Assembly. “I was obliged to fill out five sets of these documents in duplicate and to supply the most meticulous details of my possessions, down to my gold signet ring. As I was in transit through most of the countries, the whole operation seemed to me the most shocking waste of time and energy.”

But Hyde’s message was about more than just paperwork. During the debate, he framed the elimination of visas as a crucial and achievable step towards realising European unity. What might appear a minor administrative issue, he insisted, had far-reaching consequences for integration. “Our main proposal is that, as an initial step, wherever they are still required, visas should be completely abolished, as soon as possible, for travel between all member countries of the Council of Europe”, he declared. These barriers, though mundane, touched the everyday lives of people across the continent— “whether for business or pleasure”. By removing them, Europe would not only make travel easier but would affirm its commitment



to connection over division. “If, by our joint endeavours, we can do anything to make travel between our countries freer and easier,” he said, “we shall have taken a great step towards achieving the ideal of European unity [...] and earned the sincere gratitude of every traveller in Europe, by land or sea or air”.

At the close of the sitting, Kapani called for a vote. No one requested a roll call, and the draft recommendation was adopted unanimously by a show of hands. The scope of the recommendation extended beyond visas: it proposed eliminating passport controls during travel between Council of Europe countries, citing the existing agreement among the Scandinavian states as a model. In essence, this report laid the foundation for what would later be formalised within the European Union as the Schengen Area in 1995.

The Parliamentary Assembly even pushed the idea further, calling for either the abolition of border currency controls for Council of Europe nationals or, at the very least, a significant simplification, limiting checks to spot controls only. The report was impressively detailed. It specified the quantities tourists from member countries could carry across borders without incurring customs duties: up to 200 cigarettes (or 250 grams of tobacco or 25 cigars), two litres of wine or spirits, and one-eighth of a litre of perfume. It also clarified that travellers would face no controls when bringing items such as textiles, watches, jewellery, binoculars, cameras, radios, typewriters, bicycles, and sporting goods including camping equipment, tennis rackets, fishing gear, and baby carriages. Parliamentarians welcomed the report with enthusiasm, recognising it as a revolutionary step towards a Europe without borders.

Council of Europe member states responded positively to the Assembly’s recommendation. By the mid-1950s, eight out of fifteen countries—Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—had declared the elimination of visa requirements for fellow member states. The Scandinavian countries, together with Ireland, also waived visas for citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany.



Türkiye joined this momentum: in 1953, it signed bilateral agreements with Germany and the Netherlands, and in 1956 with France and Belgium, to mutually abolish compulsory visas. The Parliamentary Assembly recommendation marked a meaningful stride towards a more connected continent, advancing what many were already calling “the European idea”. Speaking before the Assembly in 1954, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer described it as a step that served “to remind our citizens that they belong to the greater homeland which is Europe”.

The Committee of Ministers reinforced this direction with another recommendation on 18 May 1955, urging member states once more to abolish visa requirements. Its explanatory memorandum noted that nine countries had already eliminated visas for tourist travel among Council of Europe citizens, and that Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Türkiye had pledged to do the same by 1 January 1956. The Committee of Ministers also encouraged exploring the possibility of lifting visa requirements for travel between Council of Europe member states and certain non-member countries, including Austria, Finland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. These efforts culminated in the signature of the European Agreement on Regulations governing the Movement of Persons between Member States of the Council of Europe on 13 December 1957. Türkiye signed and ratified the Agreement on 25 May 1961. Within just over a decade of the war’s end, the foundations of a borderless Europe were laid—and Türkiye was among those who helped build it. For a time, the vision of unrestricted movement across European borders appeared firmly established, reflecting a shared commitment to unity and co-operation.

Yet, by the late 1970s, shifting political and social dynamics began to strain this ideal, heralding a period of increased restrictions. In July 1980, the Federal Republic of Germany formally notified the Secretary General of the Council of Europe of its decision to impose visa requirements on Turkish nationals, effectively suspending a key pillar of the European visa-free regime. In a note verbale dated 9 July and registered on 10 July, Germany declared that, as of



5 October 1980, Turkish citizens would be required to obtain visas to enter its territory. The 1953 Germano-Turkish bilateral agreement on visa-free travel was thus unilaterally terminated. Citing concerns over public order, Germany justified its decision by pointing to a sharp rise in the number of Turkish nationals allegedly seeking to bypass residence and asylum regulations. The declaration also stated that this measure would be reviewed after three years.

This marked the beginning of Türkiye's gradual exclusion from the very free movement zone it had helped to establish in post-war Europe. The issue reached the broader European political arena in a Parliamentary Assembly plenary debate on 30 September 1980. At that debate, French Prime Minister Raymond Barre, attending as a guest speaker, faced questions over France's own decision to reintroduce visa requirements for Turkish citizens—announced just days after Germany's move, on 24 September 1980. The dual reimposition of visas by two of Europe's core states signalled a dramatic reversal in the ideals of open borders and integration, especially for Turkish citizens who had once been central to the vision of a borderless continent.

Although the military coup of 12 September 1980 had dissolved the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, the ruling junta still allowed a small group of Turkish parliamentarians to participate in the Parliamentary Assembly plenary session in Strasbourg later that month. Among them was Besim Üstünel, a member of the CHP and rapporteur of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development on the topic of co-operation between the countries of southern and northern Europe.

During the debate, Besim Üstünel strongly challenged the French Prime Minister regarding France's abrupt decision to reintroduce compulsory visas for Turkish nationals effective from 5 October 1980. Üstünel emphasised that this sudden measure blatantly contravened the spirit of the European agreements underpinning the Council of Europe—agreements meant to foster co-operation and free movement among member states. He warned that isolating Türkiye—a country deeply embedded in Western



alliances for over three decades—would not only deepen public resentment towards the West but also exacerbate the already complex efforts of Türkiye’s authorities, who were struggling to restore democracy and secure human rights amid political turmoil.

In his response, Prime Minister Raymond Barre acknowledged that the French Government had officially suspended the bilateral agreements regulating free movement with Türkiye, citing Article 7 of the European Agreement on movement of persons. This decision followed similar actions taken by other European nations, reflecting a shared concern over rising challenges. Barre explained that the reintroduction of visas was primarily motivated by public order considerations: France sought to prevent the influx of clandestine workers who might enter illegally due to suspended immigration policies since 1974. Furthermore, Barre highlighted the political instability of the period and the threat posed by unsupervised individuals potentially involved in acts of terrorism, referencing the recent attack on the Turkish Embassy’s press attaché in Paris. He also expressed concern over demonstrations like those staged recently in Strasbourg before the Council of Europe, which added to France’s urgency to control its borders more tightly. This explanation underscored the tension between upholding European ideals of free movement and addressing real security and political challenges faced by member states during that turbulent time.

Throughout that week’s debates in Strasbourg, Türkiye was at the centre of attention within the Assembly. In addition to the Parliamentary Assembly debate on the decision by Germany and France to reintroduce compulsory visas for Turkish citizens, the Assembly also held an extraordinary debate on the military coup of 12 September. The debate on “Compulsory visas for Turkish citizens” took place on 2 October 1980 and marked the first time that the Parliamentary Assembly had addressed this specific issue. Swiss parliamentarian Richard Müller, a member of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, was appointed rapporteur. The report and its draft recommendation were sharply critical of Germany



and France, urging the removal of compulsory visa requirements for Turkish citizens.

Opening the debate, Müller acknowledged Raymond Barre's concerns about public order but firmly criticised the reintroduction of visas. "I wonder whether compulsory visas will alter that situation", he remarked, questioning the effectiveness of such measures in curbing illegal immigration. He argued that targeting a Council of Europe member state—particularly one facing significant political and economic turmoil—was both politically misguided and symbolically damaging. With Türkiye surrounded by authoritarian regimes and struggling to return to democratic governance, Müller warned that isolating the country could push it towards dangerous alternatives:

"Do we really want to give the Turkish population the impression that they are among the outcasts of Europe? Do we want to strengthen trends [...] towards an extremist Islamic regime led by the Mullahs? As far as I am concerned, one Ayatollah Khomeini is enough. Above all, however, the introduction of compulsory visas seems to conflict with the meaning and spirit of our European community. I refer here, among other things, to Article 1 of our Statute which states that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members."

He concluded by urging Germany and France to reverse their decisions and called on other member states to refrain from adopting similar restrictions.

The next speaker, Belgian Socialist parliamentarian Claude Dejardin, was even more outspoken. He denounced what he saw as an attempt to scapegoat Turkish nationals for isolated acts of terrorism, calling French Prime Minister Barre's attitude "infamous". Dejardin rejected the justification of public order concerns, stating: "Excuses are being sought to justify these exceptional measures." Drawing attention to the contradiction between the Assembly's commitment to European integration and its actions against one of its poorest member states, he warned, "We mouth the words 'European identity.' We want to build Europe. Yet in the present difficult times, what are we doing? We are in a hurry to take a step against



one of our member countries, but which? The poorest member of the European community. That I cannot accept, Mr President, unless, as the Rapporteur implied, we want to push Türkiye out of Europe.”

In a striking moment of rhetorical force, Dejardin turned his attention to the apparent contradictions within the Assembly itself. He called out those who, just days earlier, had argued in defence of Türkiye’s continued membership in the Council of Europe despite the military coup, invoking the need for understanding and compassion towards the generals then in power. “But in that case”, he asked pointedly, “where are they now, when we have to support the retention of Türkiye among us as part of Europe?” His criticism was especially directed at German Christian Democrat members of the Parliamentary Assembly, who, in his view, sought to reconcile two incompatible positions: advocating for Türkiye’s presence in the Council of Europe while simultaneously endorsing visa restrictions that effectively marginalised its people.

Highlighting what he saw as a double standard, Dejardin suggested that economic interests—such as those of West German banks—were being shielded, while Turkish migrant workers bore the consequences. Acknowledging the domestic political pressures his German colleagues faced, including upcoming elections and growing xenophobic sentiment, he nonetheless urged them to resist the tide and instead “welcome Turkish migrant workers”, arguing that this was the moment to show Europe’s true commitment to generosity and solidarity.

Adding his voice to the growing chorus of criticism, Dutch Socialist parliamentarian Pieter Stoffelen delivered a forceful denunciation of the visa reintroduction measures. He strongly objected to the rationale offered by French Prime Minister Raymond Barre, who had linked the visa requirement to concerns about terrorism and public order. “I must admit”, Stoffelen said, “that I was shocked to hear the French Prime Minister state [...] that without compulsory visas, terrorists would enter France.” For Stoffelen, this logic was not only flawed but also a direct affront to the dignity of the Turkish people. He rejected the idea that visa policy should be used as a tool for managing



labour or security concerns, insisting instead that such matters should be addressed through appropriate legislation on migrant workers and employment.

From both a legal and political standpoint, Stoffelen deemed the reintroduction of visas incompatible with the European Agreement, warning that such actions risked undermining the integrity of the Council of Europe's legal framework. "I cannot work in this Assembly or promote the introduction of new conventions", he declared, "if international conventions and agreements are abused in the way that they have been". Ultimately, he emphasised that the credibility of European conventions and the future of EEC–Türkiye relations were at stake, affirming that the Dutch Socialist members would support the draft recommendation calling for the lifting of visa requirements.

He also stressed the broader geopolitical consequences of singling out Türkiye: "It is quite obvious that compulsory visas for nationals of just one other member state—and, moreover, the motives for such a compulsory visa—will damage relations between Türkiye and free Europe and between Türkiye and the Atlantic Alliance (NATO)." In his view, at a time of political turbulence in Türkiye and in the region more broadly, it was both "unwise and irresponsible" to jeopardise relations with a long-standing ally. "For the sake of the credibility of the institution of European conventions and agreements in general, and of the spirit and letter of this agreement in particular, as well as for the sake of relations between Türkiye and free Europe", Stoffelen concluded, "the Dutch Socialist members will vote in favour of the draft recommendation."

These sharp criticisms from Socialist parliamentarians provoked a strong response from French and German representatives. Lenelotte von Bothmer, a German member of the Socialist Group, expressed her astonishment at the harsh tone directed at Germany. She firmly rejected the notion that the visa measure was tied to terrorism or electoral politics, stating: "First, this measure has nothing to do with terrorism in our country or in other countries. Nor has it anything to do with the fact that there might have been friction between the German



population and the Turkish workers and their families who live among us.”

Von Bothmer backed her position with figures illustrating the sharp increase in Turkish asylum applications in Germany—from 1 163 in 1977 to 47 680 in just the first half of 1980. While acknowledging that the Turkish community was largely integrated and valued—with significant educational efforts to preserve language and culture—she stressed the magnitude of the recent influx: “The avalanche of Turks entering Federal Germany has now assumed gigantic proportions”, she warned, noting the pressure it placed on housing in several towns. She also clarified that the decision to reintroduce visas in July was made independently of the military coup of 12 September, with its primary purpose being to maintain public order.

Turkish parliamentarian Metin Toker responded directly to the German delegation, acknowledging the increase in asylum requests during the first quarter of 1980 but calling for a fuller picture:

“My German colleague is no doubt right when she says that during the first quarter of this year, there were 47 000 requests for political asylum. But can she also give us the figures for the second quarter when Germany had begun to take steps to prevent inadmissible requests for asylum? The number of fugitives had then decreased considerably.” He stressed that imposing visas on Turkish nationals was not a legitimate solution to asylum issues and warned against misjudging Turkish resolve: “For many Europeans, some in any case, Turks will swallow anything. You can hit them, and they will not turn a hair or try to get their own back. But beware! This is not always the case. The sick man of the Bosphorus received many blows and gave the impression that he would take anything. But at the most critical moment of his history, when his country was on the point of being invaded, the Turks showed they knew how to hit back.”

Cevdet Akçalı, head of the Turkish delegation, voiced concern over the practical effects of the visa requirements on Turkish members of the Parliamentary Assembly:



"Our friends who have spoken here have made it known that they wish to see all the Turkish members of the Parliamentary Assembly soon taking their seats in Strasbourg. I am very doubtful whether that can happen—not because the government recently installed in Türkiye will forbid us to come, but precisely because even if we have managed to get a diplomatic passport, we may not be able to come here because a visa will still be required. And even if we get that visa in time, we shall have a document in our hands which carries this stain on the Council of Europe's charter."

Another Turkish parliamentarian, Turan Güneş, broadened the debate by denouncing what he described as "legal and racial discrimination" against Turkish citizens. This accusation triggered strong objections from German parliamentarians, who insisted that the issue reflected a "particular situation" rather than outright discrimination. The debate concluded with rapporteur Richard Müller urging empathy:

"Just try to understand the feelings of the other side. You do not want to discriminate, but the Turks feel they are the victims of discrimination! We have problems with migrant workers in Switzerland, but we do not introduce compulsory visas just because an Italian has molested a woman or brandished a knife, or because there are too many of them. I feel bound to say that the spirit of the Council of Europe, the spirit of a united Europe is certainly not served by such a measure. Therefore, we are urging the Committee of Ministers to invite the governments concerned to reverse their decision as soon as possible."

The draft recommendation, presented by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography and adopted by a show of hands at the end of the plenary debate, expressed deep concern over the decision by the Federal Republic of Germany and France to impose compulsory visas on Turkish nationals beginning 5 October 1980. It warned that other member states—especially those within the European Communities—might follow suit. The draft strongly condemned the discriminatory nature of this policy, arguing that it ran counter to the Council of Europe's



fundamental goal of fostering unity among its members. It further warned of the harmful impact on the integration of Turkish migrants in host countries—a process already fraught with difficulty.

More broadly, the recommendation cautioned that these measures risked sending a message to the Turkish people that European solidarity was rhetorical, inconsistent, and selectively applied—particularly to countries like Türkiye that, due to geography and history, had not experienced the same industrial development as Western European states. Recalling Türkiye’s consistent support for European integration, the draft urged member governments not to undermine Ankara’s pro-European orientation, especially given that Türkiye was surrounded—except for rare exceptions—by non-democratic regimes. The recommendation called on the Committee of Ministers to urge states that had imposed compulsory visas to reconsider and repeal them and invited other member states, especially those within the European Communities, to avoid adopting similar restrictions. It passed with a large majority.

Yet despite the Assembly’s strong recommendation, several Western European countries moved to suspend the provisions of the European Agreement of 13 December 1957 with respect to Türkiye. France led the way by formally notifying the Secretariat General of its decision on 24 September 1980. This was swiftly followed by nearly identical declarations from Belgium and the Netherlands on 24 October 1980, and later by Switzerland on 30 June 1982. The striking similarity of the language used in these notifications suggested they were either co-ordinated or directly modelled on the original German declaration.

Turkish parliamentarians expressed deep frustration and disappointment, condemning the unfair and discriminatory nature of these suspensions. Their appeals, however, fell largely on deaf ears. What proved especially disheartening were the official explanations accompanying the decisions—justifications that failed to grapple with the deeper political and social complexities and instead appeared to be thinly veiled rationales for exclusion. The



episode deepened the growing sense of alienation between Türkiye and certain Western European states, raising broader questions about Türkiye's place in the European community.

On 3 October 1984, during a plenary sitting of the Assembly, Roland Dumas—then France's Minister for European Affairs and Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers—participated in a debate. Following his remarks, Turkish delegate Bülent Akarcalı (ANAP) took the floor. Referring to Assembly Recommendation 906 (1980), he expressed concern that several member states had imposed compulsory visa requirements on Turkish nationals four years earlier—a move he said undermined European solidarity. Akarcalı argued that the justifications offered for the measures had never been valid, especially given Türkiye's responsible conduct and its efforts to meet administrative and legislative expectations. He stressed that imposing visa requirements on citizens of a member state ran counter to the Council of Europe's mission of greater unity and asked whether it was time for the states concerned to reconsider their decision. He also inquired whether the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers intended to raise the issue with the governments involved and urge them to repeal what he described as a discriminatory policy.

Dumas' reply was candid and somewhat unexpected. He affirmed that the Europe being built was meant to be one of freedom—including freedom of movement. However, he acknowledged that ideals sometimes clash with reality. Recalling the Committee of Ministers' earlier response in January 1981 to Recommendation 906 (1980), he noted that the countries concerned had justified their decisions on grounds of public order. These actions, he said, were not discriminatory and were consistent with the European Agreement on Regulations governing the Movement of Persons, which allows temporary suspensions for reasons of public policy, security, or health. He conceded that the restrictions were meant to be temporary and subject to future review, though he noted that temporary measures sometimes become permanent. While he refrained from expressing a personal view on whether the visa restrictions



should remain, Dumas offered to place the matter on the Committee of Ministers' agenda for further discussion.

The issue resurfaced during the German Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in 1985. On 24 April, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Germany's Foreign Minister and Chairman-in-Office, addressed the Assembly in Strasbourg. After his speech, Turkish delegate İsmet Özarslan (ANAP) raised the concern that ten out of twenty-one member states had imposed visa requirements on Turkish nationals. He reiterated that these measures contradicted the Council of Europe's principles and agreements and asked whether Germany might revise its policy.

In his reply, Genscher distanced Germany from sole responsibility, noting that the issue involved multiple countries with different justifications. Speaking specifically for Germany, he explained that the visa requirement—introduced on 5 October 1980—had not been imposed unilaterally but had been discussed with the Turkish Government in office prior to the 12 September military coup. This assertion—that the civilian Turkish Government had been party to the measure—was both significant and unexpected. Yet no Turkish parliamentarian challenged or sought clarification on this claim, leaving it uncontested in the debate.

Genscher, well prepared and assertive, defended the policy as a necessary response to Germany's limited capacity to absorb more Turkish workers. Framing it as a joint responsibility of both governments, he warned against "a latter-day migration of peoples" that merely displaced problems rather than solving them. He argued that migration driven by economic need ran contrary to the ideals of the European Community and the Council of Europe. Instead, he underscored Germany's commitment to bilateral co-operation with Türkiye, aiming to improve conditions in countries of origin and reduce emigration pressure. In his view, Germany's visa policy was pragmatic, co-operative, and aligned with a broader European vision of stability and development.

Following Genscher's remarks, Özarslan highlighted the human impact of the visa regime, especially the separation



of families. Genscher, however, denied any direct link between visa policy and family separation. He concluded that the requirement would likely remain in place until Türkiye's living standards more closely matched those of other Council of Europe and European Community states—thereby eliminating the root causes of migration.

On 10 November 1989, the Committee of Ministers formally replied to questions submitted by Turkish parliamentarians in 1987. The response stated that some member states viewed the introduction of compulsory visas as a “reaction against exceptional conditions”.

Türkiye's struggle for visa liberalisation with Europe did not begin with the EU—it was first lost, quietly and conclusively, within the Council of Europe during the 1980s. Turkish parliamentarians voiced their objections in debates, denounced discrimination, and appealed to the ideals of European solidarity. But their efforts failed to reverse the policy.

Most strikingly, no one ever formally contested Hans-Dietrich Genscher's assertion that the visa requirement had been introduced “not unilaterally, but in conjunction with the Turkish Government in power before the take-over by the generals”. That statement has stood unchallenged ever since – unexamined by institutions, forgotten by diplomacy, and absorbed into the political landscape of a Europe that, for Turks, has remained just out of reach.

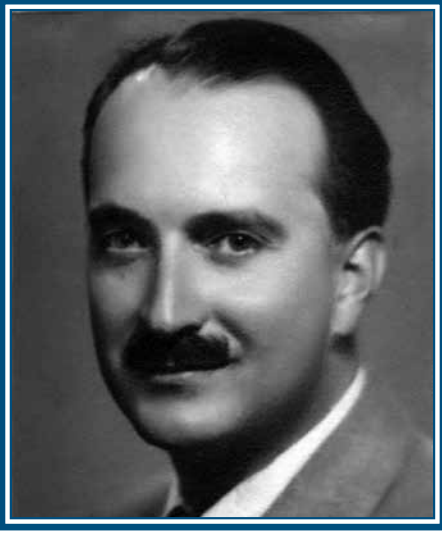
European refugees

The plight of European refugees emerged as one of the most pressing issues during the formative years of the Council of Europe. In the aftermath of the Second World War, millions of people were uprooted by political, ideological, and economic upheaval—often against their will. A significant proportion of these refugees came from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, regions that soon fell behind the Iron Curtain.

Among the Council of Europe's member states, Germany, Türkiye, and Greece were particularly affected by the refugee crisis. What united these three countries was not only their geographic proximity to the Eastern Bloc but also the presence of substantial populations of shared ethnic origin residing across those borders. Millions of ethnic Germans and ethnic Turks lived in countries under Soviet influence, and many of them would eventually seek refuge in their ancestral homelands. In Germany alone, the refugee population was estimated to exceed nine million; across all member states of the Council of Europe, the total number reached over twelve million.

The matter was first taken up by the Assembly. On 8 August 1950, a group of parliamentarians led by Harold Macmillan of the United Kingdom proposed the creation of a special committee on refugees. The proposal was swiftly accepted, and the Special Committee on European Refugees was established just weeks later, on 21 August. One of its first undertakings was a report prepared by Etienne de la Vallée-Poussin, a Belgian member of the Assembly. Based on limited but compelling data, the report underscored the urgent need for European solidarity in addressing the refugee crisis.

Türkiye was one of the countries thrust into the spotlight during this period. Hundreds of thousands of Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin faced forced eviction by the Bulgarian regime, creating a major humanitarian and political crisis. On 5 November 1950, Italian Foreign Minister Count Carlo Sforza—then Chairman-in-Office of



Ziyad Ebüzziya,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
7 August 1950–
16 April 1956

the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe—sent a letter to the President of the Assembly, Paul-Henri Spaak. In it, he called for strong co-operation with Türkiye to counter the imminent transfer of 250 000 Turks from Bulgaria within a period of three months. Sforza's diplomatic career had long been connected to the Ottoman Empire and to the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Having served twice as a diplomat in Istanbul in the early twentieth century, he was acutely aware of the presence of Turkish minorities in the Balkans.

The Committee of Ministers immediately adopted a resolution condemning Bulgaria's plan to expel its

Turkish minority as a threat intended to cause "misery in the economic life of free countries of Europe". Bulgaria was urged not to expatriate or seize the property of any members of its Turkish minority until an equitable agreement had been reached between the Turkish and Bulgarian governments. Following the Council of Europe's intervention, bilateral talks between Ankara and Sofia commenced, and by 1951 Türkiye reported progress in negotiations back to Strasbourg.

In response to the Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers' call for urgent action on the refugee question, the Parliamentary Assembly held its first plenary debate on the problem of refugees and over-population on 7 December 1951 in Strasbourg. The situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria featured prominently in the discussions.

During the debate, Turkish parliamentarian Ziyad Ebüzziya (DP) spoke passionately, accusing Bulgaria of deliberately undermining the Turkish economy through mass expulsions. He stated:

"The refugee problem in Türkiye arose abruptly when Bulgaria decided to expel nearly 900 000 Turks, who had



lived since the 13th century on territory that now forms part of Bulgaria, directly bordering our country. Our budget, already heavily burdened by military expenses—which have accounted for 45 to 50% of total spending over the past 12 years—was simply unable to bear this new strain. Indeed, it was Bulgaria's intention to worsen our already difficult economic situation. The timing of Bulgaria's decision, immediately following Türkiye's participation in the Korean War, clearly reveals their true motives. So far, only 160 000 of these émigrés have arrived in Türkiye, and they have already created enormous challenges. It is important to note that 14% of these refugees are between 15 and 45 years old; the remainder are children or elderly. Nearly all arrived in desperate conditions—barefoot and with only the clothes on their backs."

Ebüzziya went on to detail the severe economic impact on Türkiye:

"Eighty-three percent of our population are peasants. Of our eleven million working population, seven million toils on the land. Due to the harsh climate and limited crop variety, these peasants can work no more than four months a year. This results in an annual loss of 772 million dollars from our national income. Among our 1.5 million urban workers, 225 000 are unemployed—16% of the total—and this number grows annually with a population increase of 2.1%. Despite incentives for foreign investors, investment remains insufficient. While we benefit from Marshall Aid, Türkiye ranks last among recipient countries. Since the program began, Türkiye has received only 252 million dollars, compared to Britain's 825 million. Still, according to Marshall Aid and OEEC statistics, we have managed to boost agricultural production from 45% to 150%, showing that with effective support, Türkiye could overcome its current difficulties. To fully integrate the 160 000 refugees who have arrived, we need 32 million dollars, and an additional 260 million dollars—roughly 2 000 dollars per family of five—will be required for the remaining refugees Bulgaria intends to send us. This sum equals our entire annual budget and underscores the scale of the challenge we face. Moreover, there are fears that Romania, home to a million Turks, may pursue similar expulsion policies."



In concluding his speech, Ziyad Ebüzziya called for the creation of a unified European authority to address the refugee crisis comprehensively.

Another Turkish parliamentarian, Suat Hayri Ürgüplü, took a broader view, warning of the mounting challenges posed by Europe's growing refugee population:

"What I fear are the millions of other refugees, whose number is increasing day by day in this old Continent of ours – which already possesses a population of several hundred million – in this old mechanised and industrialised Continent of ours, where economic life progresses very slowly and which is incapable of feeding such a large population. The difficulties will be serious, and the political and social dangers acute."

Ürgüplü pointed out the paradox of underpopulated and underdeveloped regions around the world—regions historically tied to Europe—remaining neglected, only to become hotbeds of anti-colonial sentiment and upheaval. He concluded with an appeal to confront poverty at its root:

"It is absolutely essential that we should succeed, if we do not want to have millions of starving persons on our hands. It is possible to combat everything, but it is very difficult to combat famine, and our aim must be to banish famine and poverty."

Ankara's repeated appeals for solidarity eventually gained traction. On 7 May 1953, the Committee of Ministers adopted a resolution encouraging international support for Turkish-led projects aimed at assisting refugees of Turkish origin from Bulgaria. The Parliamentary Assembly echoed this position in a document published on 24 June 1953. That same year, the Assembly also prepared a report on the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), noting that Türkiye was not only dealing with Bulgarian Turks but also experiencing an influx of refugees from Albania. Although exact figures remained elusive, the report estimated that more than 150 000 Bulgarian refugees alone had taken shelter in Türkiye—far surpassing initial expectations.



Over time, the Council of Europe developed greater expertise in addressing refugee issues. In 1954, it took a major institutional step by appointing a dedicated official: French parliamentarian Pierre Schneider became the Council of Europe's Special Representative for National Refugees and Over-Population. Schneider brought relevant experience to the role, having previously served as Secretary for German and Austrian Affairs and as Minister of Health in the aftermath of the Second World War.

To compile the Council's first comprehensive report on the refugee situation in Europe, Schneider embarked on a fact-finding mission across several countries, including the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Greece, and Türkiye. During his visit to Türkiye, he held meetings with senior officials such as Refik Koraltan, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly; Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü; former Parliamentary Assembly member and Secretary of State Osman Kapani; and representatives of the Turkish Red Crescent Society.

In his report, Schneider recalled Türkiye's long history of offering refuge to people of Turkish descent, dating back to the influx of Russian Turks following the 1917 October Revolution. Between 1950 and 1951 alone, 154 393 refugees—originating not only from the Balkans but also from Eastern Turkistan—had found shelter in Türkiye. The report noted that the Turkish Government had built over 30 000 houses to accommodate these populations, most of whom were resettled in the northern and western regions of the country. In addition to housing, the government also provided refugees with tractors, livestock, and financial subsidies to facilitate their integration into agricultural and commercial life.

Schneider personally visited refugee camps and housing projects in Eskişehir, Bursa, and Istanbul. His observations in Türkiye led him to a hopeful conclusion:

"My talks and my own impressions have convinced me that all the refugees in Türkiye can be absorbed into the national economy. Remarkable results have already been achieved through the government's efforts. If the capital



invested by the government were to be supplemented by European and international contributions, the process would be accelerated still further.”

At the invitation of the Turkish Government, Schneider returned to Türkiye for a second visit between 27 September and 8 October 1959. During this mission, he inspected newly constructed housing and resettlement centres in Ulukışla, Ereğli, Denizli, and Kırşehir, built for refugees from Bulgaria and East Turkistan. His visit coincided with a new wave of migration—this time from Yugoslavia. Schneider observed a marked escalation in arrivals:

“While the problem of national refugees from Bulgaria and Turkistan has been more or less solved, Türkiye now has to face the problem of absorbing refugees from Yugoslavia of which it is estimated that there are at present 4 000–5 000 coming into the country every month. This figure represents a considerable increase in the rate of resettlement since the total number of national refugees from Yugoslavia in 1957 was only 13 000.”

Schneider’s final report on refugees in Türkiye was published by the Parliamentary Assembly in September 1963. It was accompanied by a report from Irish parliamentarian Michael Carthy, which estimated that 600 000 refugees from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Romania had settled in Türkiye between 1945 and 1960. The report praised Türkiye’s efforts, noting that these refugees had been “successfully” integrated—a recognition of the country’s long-standing commitment to humanitarian responsibility despite its limited resources.

The problem of Hungarian refugees that emerged in the 1950s constituted another chapter in Europe’s post-war humanitarian challenges. Thousands of Hungarian citizens fled their country following the political upheaval of 1956, and the Council of Europe—along with many of its member states, including Türkiye—responded swiftly. In 1957, the Turkish Government announced its willingness to receive 500 Hungarian refugees. At the same time, the Turkish Red Crescent sent medical supplies and blankets to support Hungarian refugees housed in Vienna.



An information note transmitted by the Committee of Ministers to the Parliamentary Assembly on 30 April 1957 detailed Türkiye's concrete efforts. Between 12 and 27 February, a total of 505 Hungarian refugees were settled in Türkiye in eight groups and accommodated in refugee centres located in Istanbul's Sirkeci and Pendik districts. The note also recorded significant local support: a charitable foundation distributed over 2 200 items of clothing; the Turkish Red Crescent provided each refugee with a monthly stipend of 100 Turkish Lira and raised an additional 4 000 TL in donations for Hungarian patients; shoemakers in Istanbul donated 248 pairs of shoes; and readers of the daily *Milliyet* newspaper contributed 36 000 TL.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the refugee issue largely receded from the Council of Europe's agenda, as post-war displacement tapered off and many countries focused instead on economic reconstruction, European integration, and Cold War stability. While occasional concerns arose regarding the status of minorities and stateless persons, refugee movements within Europe had significantly diminished compared to the immediate post-war years. Moreover, the Council of Europe's attention increasingly shifted towards legal standard-setting, human rights monitoring, and cultural co-operation.

However, the refugee question re-emerged forcefully in the 1980s due to the Bulgarian communist regime's assimilation campaign against its Turkish minority. Under the leadership of Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian government launched a sweeping policy aimed at eradicating Turkish identity through forced name changes, the prohibition of Turkish language and cultural practices, and heavy surveillance of the Turkish community. The campaign intruded even upon the dead—requiring the renaming of gravestones—and sought to erase centuries of cultural heritage.

These developments caused widespread alarm in Türkiye, which regarded the situation not only as a human rights crisis but also as a matter of historical and cultural solidarity. What made the reaction particularly striking was that even



the Communist Party of Türkiye (TKP)—long aligned with Sofia and Moscow and often critical of Ankara’s foreign policy—felt compelled to denounce the campaign. The TKP attempted to persuade Bulgarian authorities to reconsider their course, framing the policy as a betrayal of socialist ideals and international solidarity. The rare convergence of concern across Türkiye’s political spectrum highlighted the gravity of the situation and helped bring the issue to the attention of the Council of Europe.

The Assembly responded by adopting two resolutions condemning the assimilation policy, the first in 1985 and the second in 1989. The 1985 resolution, based on a report by British Conservative MP David Atkinson, was adopted on 26 September. Turkish parliamentarians Kamran İnönü and Haluk Bayülken—both respected figures in foreign policy—spoke during the debate, calling on the Bulgarian government to halt its campaign against its citizens of Turkish origin.

Meanwhile, survivors of the Belene forced labour camp—one of the most notorious detention facilities in communist Bulgaria, located on the Danube Island of the same name—continued to seek justice through European institutions. Established in the early years of the regime and revived in the 1980s as part of the assimilation campaign, Belene became a symbol of repression, where many Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin were imprisoned without trial for resisting forced name changes, practising their faith, or simply expressing dissent. Conditions were harsh, with reports of psychological abuse, overcrowding, and hard labour, reflecting the broader climate of state-sponsored persecution.

Following the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, survivors and their families turned to the Council of Europe and, later, the European Court of Human Rights in search of redress. Their efforts gained renewed visibility in 2009, when the Parliamentary Assembly issued a report on Bulgaria—by then a member of the European Union—which explicitly called for compensation for the victims of Belene and for broader accountability for the crimes committed during the assimilation campaign.



In parallel, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe's independent monitoring body, has continued to criticise the persistent marginalisation of Bulgaria's Turkish minority. Its reports have drawn attention to patterns of discrimination in education, employment, and political representation, underscoring that the legacies of the assimilation policy remain unresolved even decades after its official end.

Greek–Turkish nostalgic friendship at the Council of Europe

It may come as a surprise today—given the long and often fraught history between them—but in the early years of the Council of Europe, Türkiye and Greece stood side by side as close partners in a shared European project. When both countries joined the Council of Europe on 9 August 1949, they did so not as rivals, but as equals entering a new era of continental co-operation. Their representatives—parliamentarians, diplomats, and intellectuals—arrived together in Strasbourg, navigating the unfamiliar terrain of European diplomacy as allies. In the corridors of the Palais de l'Europe, they discovered more common ground than division. Both stood at the southeastern edge of the continent, geographically distant from their fellow member states but brought closer by shared concerns: the struggle to modernise their economies, the burdens of post-war recovery, and the ambition to secure their place in the emerging democratic order.

This sense of proximity was not only strategic but personal. Turkish and Greek parliamentarians often spoke on each other's behalf in Parliamentary Assembly debates, defended one another's positions, and co-sponsored joint proposals. At a time when the scars of past wars remained visible and the shadows of future conflicts had yet to fall, their co-operation reflected a kind of hopeful idealism—a belief that the new Europe could transcend old enmities. For a brief but remarkable period, Türkiye and Greece were not adversaries but partners in shaping the cultural and political foundations of post-war Europe.

One of the earliest and most symbolic joint initiatives between the Turkish and Greek delegations took place on 26 August 1949, setting a collaborative tone that would define their relationship in the early years of the Council of Europe. Turkish parliamentarian Suut Kemal Yetkin, a



prominent intellectual and advocate for cultural dialogue, submitted a motion entitled “Methods by which the Council of Europe can develop cultural co-operation between its members”. In it, the Assembly formally requested the Committee of Ministers to establish two committees: one composed of appropriate experts—one from each member state—with a view to drafting the outline of a history of comparative civilisations; and another composed of men of letters, likewise one from each country, tasked with preparing a list of works that best illustrate the “unchanging values of civilisation”.

Rooted in the conviction that Europe’s diverse traditions were united by enduring principles, the proposal reflected a vision of European identity grounded in shared humanistic values. The motion was warmly endorsed by the Greek delegation, who—like their Turkish counterparts—believed that cultural co-operation was a foundation for lasting peace and regional understanding. Co-signed by five Turkish and four Greek parliamentarians, the motion (Doc.25) stood as an early testament to their common aspiration to build a more united Europe through intellectual and civilisational dialogue.

The second notable example of Greek-Turkish co-operation within the Parliamentary Assembly came on 17 August 1950, further underscoring their alignment in matters of cultural diplomacy. On that date, while a group of parliamentarians from various member states proposed a resolution in support of the newly established College of Europe in Bruges and the European Cultural Centre in Geneva, Greek and Turkish delegates put forward a bold and visionary counterproposal: the creation of a European Centre of Culture and a second College of Europe—this time in Istanbul. Spearheaded by Turkish parliamentarian Ekrem Hayri Üstündağ, the motion was co-signed by four Turkish, four Greek, and two Italian parliamentarians, reflecting broader regional backing. The text of the proposal emphasised the unique cultural richness of South-Eastern Europe—a crossroads of civilisations where Europe meets Asia. It argued that this region, and Istanbul in particular, held untapped potential for deepening Europe’s cultural integration:



“It is a matter of common knowledge that an almost uniform culture is to be found among European countries. However, in South-Eastern Europe where the two continents, Asia and Europe, touch one another, there is a great wealth of archaeological and cultural material to be studied. Regarding the immense importance for the unification of European culture and civilisation which would flow from the study of this material in the actual places it is found, the [Consultative] Assembly suggests that a European Centre of Culture and a European College are established in Istanbul.”

Although the proposal was examined by the various Parliamentary Assembly committees, it ultimately did not materialise. Still, it stood as a bold and imaginative gesture—symbolising the shared aspiration of Greece and Türkiye to place their region at the heart of Europe’s cultural and intellectual renewal.

English and French have always been the official languages of the Council of Europe. However, as early as 1953, parliamentarians from Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands began to challenge this linguistic *status quo* by seeking to include their national languages in the Assembly’s simultaneous interpretation services. At the time, the Parliamentary Assembly’s Rules of Procedure allowed members to speak in a language other than the official ones, but only if the speaker arranged for interpretation into either English or French. The Statute of the Council of Europe granted the Assembly the authority to define the conditions under which other languages could be used. Technically, the chamber’s facilities—particularly during plenary sessions—were already equipped for multilingual interpretation. Yet in practice, only British and French parliamentarians, along with some from Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg, could speak entirely in their native languages.

This situation placed non-native speakers at a clear disadvantage. Many skilled politicians from other member states found it difficult to express themselves fully during debates due to limited fluency in English or French. As a result, they often remained hesitant, passive, or silent in discussions—leading to an imbalance that clearly favoured native speakers of the two official languages.



Recognising this inequity, German parliamentarian Hermann Pünder took the lead. On 14 January 1953, with the support of Italian and Dutch colleagues, he submitted a motion for a resolution calling for broader linguistic inclusion. The proposal struck a chord with many parliamentarians from non-Anglophone and non-Francophone countries. Scandinavian delegates quickly followed suit, drafting an amendment to include “one of the Scandinavian languages” in the interpretation system. Inspired by this initiative, Greek and Turkish parliamentarians responded in kind. Greek delegate Stamatios Mercouris submitted an amendment on behalf of both countries, requesting the addition of “Greek and Turkish” to the list.

This moment marked a turning point: the beginning of simultaneous interpretation in languages beyond the two official ones during the Parliamentary Assembly plenary sessions. The multilingual initiative spearheaded by Hermann Pünder and his fellow parliamentarians was not merely a technical upgrade—it was a meaningful step towards more inclusive and democratic deliberation within the Assembly.

The friendship between Greek and Turkish parliamentarians within the Council of Europe was not considered unusual by other member states. From the very beginning, there was a shared understanding that Türkiye and Greece—two southeastern European nations with parallel geopolitical and economic situations—should be approached jointly, particularly in discussions on economic development. Even before the founding of the European Economic Community (EEC), the Parliamentary Assembly had already begun to explore, for example, ideas for a common agricultural policy among member states.

During a debate on 1 December 1951, Turkish parliamentarian Suat Hayri Ürgüplü delivered a noteworthy speech outlining the state of Türkiye’s agricultural economy. He noted that 83% of the Turkish population lived in rural areas, and that the country’s exports were predominantly agricultural. In this context, he made two forward-looking proposals: “Let us shape Europe’s agricultural sector” and “Türkiye and Greece can provide all of Europe’s tobacco needs.” His remarks not only reflected Türkiye’s aspirations for deeper integration into



European markets but also positioned Türkiye and Greece as vital contributors to Europe's agricultural future.

Ürgüplü's vision would gain greater significance a few years later. On 19 October 1955, the Parliamentary Assembly debated a report entitled *Economic Development in Southern Europe*. At that time, "Southern Europe" referred specifically to Italy, Türkiye and Greece. The report, drafted by Danish liberal parliamentarian Per Federspiel—who would later serve as the Parliamentary Assembly President from 1960 to 1963—highlighted the economic frustrations of the Greek and Turkish governments. Athens and Ankara expressed disappointment at the persistently low levels of imports from their countries by other Council of Europe members.

While Federspiel advised Türkiye and Greece to improve the quality and marketing of their exports, he also acknowledged the validity of their grievances. He cited Ürgüplü's earlier tobacco proposal as a missed opportunity for tangible European co-operation:

"Some time ago, the question of using a greater percentage of both Turkish and Greek tobacco in the tobacco industries of Western European countries was raised. In fact, the standards of Türkiye and Greece would have been raised considerably if five percent of Turkish or Greek tobacco had been added to Virginian cigarettes, something that probably no one would have been able to taste. Why was that not done, for it was such an obvious example of European co-operation?"

The answer, Federspiel explained, lay in the fear of national treasuries. Tobacco taxes formed a significant source of revenue, and any change that might make cigarettes less appealing—even if unlikely—was viewed as too risky by national governments. Federspiel concluded with a plea for pragmatism and solidarity:



Suat Hayri Ürgüplü,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
7 August 1950–
14 January 1953



“There may be other ways of opening our markets to a greater extent to Turkish and Greek products, and I strongly advise that in our own countries we should examine whether – as a preliminary step, as a gesture – the situation can be improved.”

His remarks echoed and revived Ürgüplü’s original call for inclusive European economic policies that did not overlook the interests of southern, less industrialised members.

In the same debate, German Social Democrat parliamentarian Helmut Kalbitzer addressed a deeply rooted prejudice that persisted in the minds of many Western Europeans regarding the peoples of Türkiye and Greece. Kalbitzer firmly asserted:

“I should like to say the following to the Western European countries: these peoples are in no way less capable of working effectively in the economic field than the peoples of the West. It is an arrogant and completely unjustified prejudice to believe that these peoples are, by nature, not in a position to participate in modern economic development.”

His words challenged widespread stereotypes and called for a reassessment of the economic potential and contributions of Türkiye and Greece. Kalbitzer argued that the key to overcoming the economic challenges faced by these countries was their full integration as equal members of the European community. This, he believed, required a comprehensive economic aid programme tailored to their specific needs. Central to his proposal was the granting of “non-repayable loans” on a large scale, aimed at facilitating initial investments in these underdeveloped economies. According to Kalbitzer, such grants were essential to lay the groundwork for the next stage of economic support—“loans on a commercial basis for the economy”. Only by combining generous initial aid with later commercial financing could these countries effectively modernise and compete within the broader European market.

The Parliamentary Assembly voted on the report and the draft resolution on Economic Development in Southern Europe on 26 October 1955. Following the resolution’s adoption, Türkiye and Greece were formally asked to



prepare detailed economic development programmes. Meanwhile, member states were encouraged to increase their trade with these two countries, signalling a concrete step towards economic inclusion. Throughout this process, Greek and Turkish parliamentarians worked closely—not only contributing to the report but also preparing numerous amendments. They lobbied jointly for a programme reminiscent of the Marshall Plan, aimed specifically at the underdeveloped states within the Council of Europe.

This initiative echoed the original Marshall Plan implemented by the United States to revive Europe's economy after the Second World War. Notably, the Federal Republic of Germany had established a special European Development Fund to assist underdeveloped Council of Europe members. Greek and Turkish parliamentarians seized on this precedent, urging other member states to create a similar fund dedicated to supporting their countries' economic growth and integration.

The warm friendship between Greek and Turkish parliamentarians persisted until the second half of the 1950s, when the Cyprus issue emerged as a contentious topic. From the mid-1950s, Greek parliamentarians and diplomats gradually began placing the issue of Cyprus's independence on the agenda of the Council of Europe, initially targeting the United Kingdom as the island's sovereign power, and later extending their efforts to Türkiye to draw broader international attention.

The Cyprus problem marked a turning point, severely straining Greek–Turkish relations. Tensions peaked in 1974, when the Greek military junta orchestrated a coup in Cyprus with the aim of annexing the island. This action triggered a military intervention by Türkiye and, just days later, led to the collapse of the junta in Athens. Greece had already been invited to leave the Council of Europe in 1969 due to the authoritarian Colonels' regime, and it was readmitted only after the junta's downfall. Despite Greece's return, relations between the two countries remained tense.

In the 1990s, the Council of Europe witnessed increasingly heated debates between Greek and Turkish parliamentarians, reflecting the deep-rooted and unresolved tensions surrounding Cyprus, but also other issues.



On 29 January 1998, during a Parliamentary Assembly plenary debate on refugees and displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greek Communist Party parliamentarian Efstratios Korakas took the floor. Representing the island of Lesbos, just a few miles from the Turkish coast, Korakas frequently declared his friendship towards the Turkish people. However, his speeches in the Assembly between 1992 and 1999 were consistently marked by sharp—and often obsessive—criticism of Türkiye, regardless of the topic under discussion. This tendency resurfaced during the debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina, when he accused Türkiye, along with the United States and Saudi Arabia, of supplying weapons to Bosnian Muslims.

In response, Turkish parliamentarian Atilla Mutman (DSP) raised a point of order. The sitting was chaired by Swiss Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly Ernst Muehleemann, who gave Mutman the floor. The following exchange ensued:

Mr Mutman: *Mr Korakas claimed that Türkiye has given arms to Muslim Bosnians. That is nothing more than a fabrication. We are used to hearing fabricated facts from Mr Korakas. Türkiye has favoured peace from the very beginning of that conflict.*

The President: *I must ask you to stop; this is not a private debate. Yes, Mr Korakas?*

Mr Korakas: *It is an attack on me! A personal attack! I cannot agree. This is a point of order.*

The President: *Very well, I call Mr Korakas on a point of order.*

Mr Korakas: *I do not know why our Turkish colleagues regard me as an enemy of Türkiye and the Turkish people. I have always been and shall always be a sincere friend of the Turks and the Kurds. I fear I may be more sincerely so than some of their representatives. What I have said about the supply of weapons by Türkiye is based on information provided by representatives of the international community, who know what they are talking about! We have learned, similarly, of the existence of a private association with 180 retired American generals training Muslim troops. My dear sir, we need to look the truth in the face!*



Mr Mutman: *On a point of order, Mr President...*

The President: *This debate is about Bosnia and Herzegovina, not Türkiye and Greece. Speakers will kindly refrain from further unsolicited comment.*

This exchange illustrated the fragility of Greek–Turkish relations in multilateral forums, where even shared values or long-standing acquaintances could be tested by divergent narratives and national sensitivities. Despite Korakas’s declared affinity for the Turkish people, his remarks once again drew a sharp rebuke—underscoring how complex and deeply rooted these bilateral tensions remained, even in debates focused on unrelated crises.

Gone were the days when Turkish and Greek parliamentarians proudly evoked the “Atatürk–Venizelos” friendship that had defined their relations between 1949 and 1963. By the mid-1960s, political realities had shifted, and this once-celebrated bond had given way to recurring tensions that came to dominate their interactions.

Kasım Gülek (CHP), one of the first Turkish members of the Parliamentary Assembly in 1949 and a leading political figure of the era, captured this transformation poignantly during a plenary debate on 5 May 1965. He described relations with Greece as follows:

“I now want to dwell nostalgically upon Greek–Turkish friendship— ‘nostalgically’ I say because this friendship—a close, intimate, sincere friendship—reigned between Greece and Türkiye for forty years; ‘reigned’ I say because unfortunately we cannot today speak of that friendship in the same vein. At the end of an unfortunate war in the early twenties, the great Turkish statesman, Commander-in-Chief of the victorious army, Atatürk, and the great statesman of Greece, Venizelos, signed a treaty of friendship that was sincere and earnest. It was taken up by the people of Greece and Türkiye, and this friendship lasted in every phase of our national lives and in international relations. Türkiye and Greece were spoken of together. It stretched to all spheres of our national life. Mr. President, even here in this Assembly, when the Deputy Secretary General was elected, we wholeheartedly supported our



Greek friend. It was a pleasure to do so. Greek–Turkish friendship is a must, Gentlemen. It is a geopolitical necessity. We are both threatened by a common danger. Friendship between Greece and Türkiye is to the advantage of both countries. Politically and economically, this friendship—so necessary and natural—was abruptly ended when agitation to annex Cyprus to Greece, the so-called ‘enosis,’ came to poison our relations. This is most unfortunate, because Cyprus could be a symbol of co-operation and friendship between Greece and Türkiye.”

Türkiye's contribution to foreign language teaching in Europe

Did you know that Türkiye played a role in shaping the policy that led to the teaching of more than one foreign language in European schools? To understand this, we must look back to the 1960s. At the time, secondary schools in many Council of Europe member states typically offered instruction in only one foreign language.

During this period, Türkiye began actively engaging with European experts to reform its approach to foreign language education. Numerous consultants were invited to assess the existing system, and their feedback was clear: Turkish schoolbooks were outdated and required substantial revision. Acting on this advice, Turkish authorities proposed the establishment of a national centre dedicated to improving foreign language instruction.

Türkiye's most significant progress in this area, however, came through its engagement with the Council of Europe. It was among the first countries to sign and ratify the European Cultural Convention when it was opened for signature in 1954. The Convention aimed to promote mutual understanding among Europeans by encouraging the study of each other's languages, histories, and cultures, and to support education policies aligned with these goals.

In accordance with the Convention's provisions, Türkiye began to explore new methodologies for language teaching towards the end of the 1950s. This initiative gained momentum in 1967, when the Turkish Government formally requested the Council of Europe's support in reforming its foreign language education system. In response, the Council of Europe dispatched Swedish education expert Svante Hjelmström to conduct a comprehensive assessment. His visit was followed by several others, as international experts continued to work with Turkish counterparts to evaluate and enhance language teaching practices in the country.



French-German
border, Strasbourg,
1960s



Türkiye was considered a “laboratory” for foreign language teaching in Europe—and for good reason. Unlike the languages spoken in most other Council of Europe member states, Turkish did not belong to the Indo-European language family. According to the Council of Europe, this linguistic difference was a key factor in Türkiye’s persistent challenges in developing an effective system for foreign language instruction.

In response, Parliamentary Assembly decided to address the issue directly and commissioned a report. Danish Conservative parliamentarian Karl Boegholm was appointed rapporteur. His report, *Development of teaching methods of modern languages in Türkiye*, was presented to the Assembly on 26 January 1970. It marked the first time the Assembly had formally debated foreign language teaching methods in a specific member state.



Introducing his report, Boegholm stressed the importance of cross-cultural communication for Europe's future:

"If we are to succeed in creating a European community, the younger generation must be able to come together to discuss their problems and, at the same time, they must be acquainted with the traditions that have created the Europe of today. Perhaps a key word of today's problems is 'communication'—taken, of course, in its modern and wider sense."

He went on to argue that Türkiye posed a particularly complex case:

"But how, we must ask ourselves, can the vast majority of young Turks of today come together in order to 'communicate' with their fellow-Europeans? I am well aware that this may be a problem for other countries as well, but it is the considered opinion of the Cultural Committee that Türkiye constitutes a special case, living its life far away from the highways of Europe in what is geographically a remote corner of the Council of Europe area."

Drawing on both geographical and historical metaphors, Boegholm remarked:

"If the times of empires were not past, one might well call Türkiye a far-flung empire reaching from the frontiers of Bulgaria to the frontiers of Iraq, Iran and Syria. There is certainly quite a distance from Erzurum to Strasbourg. That is why education—and modern language teaching in particular—presents special difficulties to the Turkish people. The Turkish language is related to no other language spoken in member states. Its only relatives in Europe are the Finnish, the Estonian and the Hungarian languages. In these circumstances it is obvious that Türkiye has not been able to create a satisfactory system of modern language teaching."

Rather than adopting a resolution, the Assembly voted on a recommendation addressed to the Committee of Ministers—the Council of Europe's decision-making body. In this recommendation, the Parliamentary Assembly urged the Committee of Ministers to adopt a comprehensive



plan for the development of modern language instruction in Türkiye. This plan was to be co-ordinated with Türkiye's national five-year development strategy and focused on several key areas: the establishment of modern teaching facilities; the renewal of language teaching methods; the integration of audiovisual tools; the modernisation of teacher training; and the expansion of in-service and continuing education for language instructors.

The Assembly also recommended that the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CCC) and its standing committees be tasked with drawing up and implementing this plan. Finally, member states were invited to intensify bilateral co-operation with Türkiye—by dispatching educational experts, offering grants to teachers and administrators, and supporting broader capacity-building efforts to increase the number of qualified foreign language teachers across the country.

Turkish parliamentarians welcomed this attention with enthusiasm. Nihat Erim was the first to take the floor:

"The Council of Europe is giving proof of solidarity in this special field. Up to now, it has concerned itself with the general problems of Europe without particularising. The question of modern language teaching is the fruit of the solidarity which reigns in the Council of Europe, and it is our country which will benefit from it. This makes me particularly happy. [...] If the Council of Europe intensifies and enlarges this gesture of solidarity towards Türkiye, we shall achieve very positive results in a short time, since the Turkish Government is granting the funds necessary for foreign-language teaching. However, as the Rapporteur stressed, the training and preparation of modern-language teachers requires a special effort. If the countries concerned—Germany, France and the United Kingdom—were to give these teachers the opportunity to attend courses at training centres in their countries, also attended by native fellow-teachers, their proficiency would be greatly improved."

Erim's intervention was followed by another Turkish delegate, Ömer Lütfü Hocaoglu, who further underlined the broader European significance of the initiative. For



Hocaoğlu, the question of modern language instruction was not simply a matter of national educational reform, but an essential element of European integration. "This is a subject which is not only important for Türkiye but for the idea of European unity and co-operation", he declared. "Language is a vital link in the cross-cultural relations in the history of civilisation. In the period of the Renaissance, the Western world came in close contact with the heritage of culture, art and science of the Eastern and Mediterranean peoples through the learning of foreign languages."



Hocaoğlu welcomed the Assembly's engagement with Türkiye's educational reforms and provided further detail about concrete developments taking place on the ground. "As pointed out in the report to the Assembly", he said, "a centre for research and development has been set up in the Ministry of Education in Ankara. Building, personnel and technical equipment have been made ready for putting this scheme into operation. What the Ministry of Education needs are high-level experts in the art of foreign language teaching." While he acknowledged the past support of the Council for Cultural Co-operation in organising and advising the Foreign Language Centre, Hocaoğlu noted that its financial capacity was insufficient to sustain this collaboration. He concluded with an appeal for additional resources from the Council of Europe: "If the Council of Europe can provide some extra funds for this purpose, this extremely valuable joint effort will be finalised through the recruitment of high-level experts."

Ömer Lütfü Hocaoğlu,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
1967–1968, 1969–
1970, 1971–1972,
1972–1974

Italian parliamentarian Amato Berthet was the next to take the floor. He argued that the plan advocated for Türkiye by the rapporteur should in fact serve as a model for broader application across Europe. "Although the area—the necessarily limited diffusion of the Turkish language—may impose on that fine country the adoption of a second and



more widespread vehicle of expression”, Berthet noted, “it is a fact that, in the face of this process of European integration, all our countries must tackle and resolve a similar problem at a European level. The mastery of one or more important world languages, in addition to one’s mother tongue, constitutes a necessary key to effective co-operation in the present-day world.”

He went on to enumerate the key elements of the proposed plan for Türkiye: the creation of modern teaching facilities, the renewal of foreign language teaching methods, the introduction of audiovisual tools, and the modernisation of teacher training, including both in-service and further education. “I consider that this plan, which our rapporteur so rightly advocates for Türkiye,” Berthet concluded, “should be extended to the European level—precisely with a view to building that Europe which represents the culmination of all our hopes.”

Although Berthet’s proposal was ultimately not included in the final recommendation adopted by the Assembly, it nevertheless left a lasting impression. His vision found considerable resonance within the Council of Europe, and in the years that followed, it began to take practical form. Over the course of the next decade, expert working groups established by the Council of Europe began to collaborate with authorities in various member states, undertaking efforts to design and promote new strategies for the teaching of multiple foreign languages. This evolution in policy and practice reflected the very ideas Berthet had put forward—namely, that multilingual competence was essential for deepening European integration and fostering effective co-operation across national boundaries.

Europe's first rapporteur on freedom of expression was a Turkish politician

You may not be familiar with the name Nihat Erim, but in Türkiye, it often brings to mind a pivotal and controversial period in the country's political history. A prominent secular politician and member of the CHP, Erim was called upon to lead the government at a time of significant national turbulence in 1971. Yet long before this moment, he had already established himself as a distinguished figure in international diplomacy and law, particularly through his work in the Council of Europe.

Among his many international engagements, Erim served as a member of the European Commission of Human Rights from 1956 to 1962 and later joined the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly between 1965 and 1970, eventually becoming one of its Vice-Presidents. During this period, he also chaired the Turkish delegation involved in drafting the constitution of the newly established Republic of Cyprus, following the Zurich and London Agreements of 1959. These roles highlight not only his legal expertise but also his strong commitment to democratic governance and the rule of law on an international scale.

One of the most forward-looking aspects of Erim's work in Strasbourg came in 1968, when he was appointed rapporteur for a pioneering report on the defence of freedom of expression in Europe. This appointment would place him at the forefront of a new and evolving human rights agenda—one that would later become a defining mission of the Council of Europe.

The year 1968 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a landmark document that enshrined freedom of expression as a



fundamental right. Human rights had long been a cornerstone of the Council of Europe's mission, and this anniversary reinvigorated attention to their defence across the continent.

Within this context, Marie-Elisabeth Klee, a German Christian Democrat and member of the Parliamentary Assembly, proposed to the Political Affairs Committee that a draft resolution on freedom of expression be prepared. The Committee appointed Nihat Erim as rapporteur. His report, entitled *The defence of freedom of opinion and expression in European countries*, became one of the first comprehensive parliamentary texts to address freedom of speech and thought at a pan-European level.

The decision to prepare such a report was both timely and necessary—but the task was far from straightforward. The report needed to explore the issue from both legal and political angles. However, the greatest challenge lay in navigating a complex and politically sensitive landscape. At that time, the Council of Europe and its Assembly remained largely Western institutions committed to democratic norms and human rights. In practice, human rights concerns were most frequently associated with Eastern Europe. For instance, Greece, despite being a member of the Council, was ruled by a military junta. Yet debates about Greece focused less on concrete violations than on its continued membership. Meanwhile, Spain and Portugal—non-members at the time—remained under authoritarian rule. The Council of Europe tended to avoid openly criticising these states, making Erim's task more delicate. In fact, this was one of the first occasions when the Political Affairs Committee undertook serious engagement with human rights across such a politically diverse group of countries.

The report was placed on the agenda of the plenary sitting held on 2 February 1968. It may be regarded as coincidence—or perhaps as a symbolic gesture—that the sitting was chaired by Yüksel Menderes (AP), Vice-President of the Assembly and a fellow Turkish delegate.



Presenting the report, Erim began by acknowledging that the member states of the Council of Europe broadly upheld fundamental rights and freedoms. However, he insisted that wherever these principles were disregarded, the Assembly bore a responsibility to hold governments accountable. He also reminded his colleagues that the Council of Europe had not hesitated in the past to speak out against serious human rights abuses beyond its own borders:

“Outside the Council of Europe, both east and west of this continent, there are countries in which the fundamental rights and freedoms that we prize so highly are not always respected”, he said. “The trial of intellectuals and writers in Soviet Russia a few weeks ago raised a wave of indignation and distress throughout Europe. The proceedings and petty annoyances of all kinds suffered by university members in Spain, for example, cause us just as much concern as these trials of intellectuals in Eastern

Nihat Erim (left), Member of the Parliamentary Assembly (1965–1968 and 1969–1970) and the first freedom of expression rapporteur of the Assembly (here in Strasbourg during a plenary sitting, 2 February 1968).



European countries. This is why the Political Committee thought it appropriate to present this draft resolution to the Assembly. The Committee tried to avoid any discrimination between countries. If any country—whether a member of the Council of Europe or not, whether Eastern or Western—shows a flagrant disregard for human rights and fundamental freedoms, our Assembly must protest. With this draft resolution, the Political Committee therefore proposes that the Assembly invite all European countries, without distinction—whether members of the Council of Europe or not, Eastern or Western, left or right—to respect human rights as fully as possible. In particular, if they prosecute intellectuals, writers, thinkers, or artists on political charges, they must at the very least ensure basic guarantees of fairness and impartiality.”

Despite the report’s measured tone, some parliamentarians criticised it for insufficiently addressing violations in Greece, Spain, and Portugal. Austrian Social Democrat Karl Czernetz voiced their concerns, expressing dissatisfaction with the vague language in the draft:

“I do not think that this formulation, ‘in certain Western countries,’ is quite sufficient. I would have liked to add a few words there. For instance, we have the examples of Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Of course, we know that there is a great difference between Greece and Spain. Greece is still a member of the Council of Europe and, we hope, will remain so as a full member when democracy returns to that country. But Spain and Portugal are not members. It is not only a matter of communist dictatorships but also of dictatorships on the other side—with persecution and suppression of freedom. As previously mentioned, a famous opposition lawyer in Portugal has been arrested without charge and is in prison. The weakness of the draft resolution lies in the vague expression ‘in certain Western countries,’ which fails to specify which countries we mean. It would have been better if the Political Committee had included this clarification.”

In response, Marie-Elisabeth Klee defended both the language and the political compromises behind the resolution:



"What we have here is a compromise. Both sides have made sacrifices. I believe, above all, that our side has made a substantial one, since we particularly wanted to highlight the trial of the writers in Moscow—young people who share the values we defend and who seek to realise the human rights on which we wish to build Europe. My friends and I had wanted a concrete decision on that specific case. But if we now begin naming all countries, these questions arise: Where do we start, and where do we end? Where are the violations, and where are there not? Professor Erim has crafted a compromise in an admirable manner. If you look at the underlying text, you will see that it is extraordinarily balanced, especially considering the concessions my colleagues and I have made."

The resolution adopted by the Assembly, while concise, was striking in both intent and implication. It reaffirmed the defence of freedom of opinion and expression as one of the core aims of the Council of Europe, drawing explicitly on the European Convention on Human Rights. Crucially, it asserted the Assembly's right—and duty—to denounce serious infringements of these freedoms, whether within the Council of Europe's membership or beyond. This universalist language marked an important moment in the evolution of the Council's human rights agenda.

What made the resolution particularly significant was its explicit reference to the recent trials of writers and intellectuals in the Soviet Union, events that had caused widespread alarm across Europe. While such criticism of Eastern regimes was not unusual during the Cold War, the resolution also—albeit more obliquely—acknowledged abuses in Western authoritarian states. This effort at balance was rare and notable, given the reluctance to name regimes such as Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal—or to challenge member states like Greece.

The resolution concluded with a forward-looking appeal, urging all European states, East and West alike, to respect the "elementary human need for intellectual freedom", particularly in cases involving politically motivated trials. Though modest in length, its wording reflected a growing recognition within the Assembly of the need for principled



and consistent responses to repression, regardless of ideology. It laid the foundations for a more systematic engagement with human rights violations and marked the beginning of the Assembly's emergence as a pan-European moral authority on democracy and civil liberties.

The Parliamentary Assembly and the archaeological heritage of Istanbul

Few cities in the world possess a cultural and archaeological legacy as rich—and as precariously balanced—as Istanbul's. For decades, the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) has debated whether the city's World Heritage status should be reassessed, raising the uncomfortable possibility that Istanbul might one day appear on the "World Heritage in Danger" list. Yet long before UNESCO raised alarm bells, the Council of Europe had already sounded the warning. Had its early proposals been heeded, Istanbul's heritage might now be far less vulnerable.

The issue of preserving Istanbul's archaeological and cultural fabric first entered the agenda of the Council of Europe in the mid-1970s, at a time when the city's unregulated urban expansion had begun to visibly threaten its historical identity. In 1976, the Committee on Culture and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly initiated a report entitled *The protection of the archaeological heritage of Istanbul*, with strong support from the Turkish delegation. This was not the committee's first foray into cultural preservation—it had launched a similar report on Venice in 1970.

The rapporteur for the Istanbul report was Victor Abens, a parliamentarian from Luxembourg. A member of the Assembly since 1964, Abens was also Vice-President of the Socialist Group and a veteran of the resistance against German occupation during the Second World War. Although he spent several weeks preparing the report, he was unable, for personal reasons, to attend the plenary debate in Strasbourg on 17 September 1976. In his absence, the report was presented by Austrian parliamentarian Franz Karasek, President of the Committee on Culture and Education. The debate was chaired by Frederik Piket, a Dutch Christian Democrat and one of the Assembly's Vice-Presidents.



Karasek described Abens' report as a "call for aid" for Istanbul. According to its findings, one of the principal threats to the city's archaeological heritage was rural exodus. Between 1935 and 1975, Istanbul's population had grown from 750 000 to over four million. By the mid-1970s, the city was absorbing an estimated 200 000 new migrants each year.

"Briefly", Karasek explained, "the following are the causes of the present situation as they appear in Mr. Abens's report. The present situation, which gave rise to this cry for help, is the result of a heavy influx of people from the countryside, and of industrialisation. The distribution of these people who come to Istanbul is more or less haphazard—they settle where they like. It can be said, therefore, that the drift from the land, industrialisation, and the concentration of businesses and shops, are resulting in the gradual destruction of the historic townscape, of its monuments and surroundings."

He went on to underline further factors: widespread land speculation, which was unsurprising under such conditions; and the sharp rise in traffic volumes, which had overwhelmed Istanbul's narrow, historic streets. "The building of new highways frequently spells the doom of beautiful old wooden houses with a character and architecture all of their own."

Despite these threats, the report noted that the Turkish Government had made initial efforts to safeguard the city's heritage. The Ministry of Culture had allocated 50 million Turkish lira for 1976, with planned increases to 75 million for 1977 and 100 million for 1978. Yet Karasek emphasised that these amounts were far from sufficient. He echoed Abens' call for European solidarity:

"Mr. Abens ends by appealing for support for the efforts of the Turkish authorities to save Istanbul, not only in the interests of Türkiye but, as is right and proper, given our draft recommendations, in the interests of Europe. He emphasises that it is not merely historic monuments such as Topkapi or the Blue Mosque which are threatened, but many smaller monuments and the wooden houses. I do not think we need too much imagination to see that



enormous sums are needed for our project to save Istanbul. So international public awareness needs to be increased, and the help of other international organisations, such as UNESCO, must be enlisted. I think that if we approve the draft recommendation submitted by Mr. Abens—I hope unconditionally—we shall be giving the Turkish people proof of the fact that we consider them a part of the European community, a community to which we all belong, and that we hold the heritage of Istanbul as dear as that of Rome, Athens, and the other great European cities to which we are attached.”

Dutch parliamentarian David van Ooijen, a member of the Socialist Group, focused his intervention on practical ways to assist the Turkish authorities. He offered a comparative example from the Netherlands:

“How can we help the authorities involved? Firstly, we can give the responsible authorities the information they need from all kinds of experts in Europe. Secondly, we can supply advice based on our experience of preserving old towns and buildings. In the Netherlands, we have had a law on the preservation of monuments since 1965. Türkiye has had such a law for a longer period. Previously in my country, before the creation of the law about the preservation of monuments, we had another method, which was effective. Since 1814, the Netherlands Government has persuaded the owners of old buildings and monuments to preserve their property by means of financial bonuses, sometimes by means of subsidy, sometimes by means of tax cuts. This method is often very persuasive. Of course we need laws, but laws alone are not effective if they do not live in the minds of the people.”

İsmail İlhan, an independent member of the Turkish Parliament, took the floor during the debate to address one of the most visible consequences of unplanned urbanisation: the proliferation of *gecekondus*—informal, makeshift dwellings often built overnight by rural migrants arriving from Anatolia in search of work. “You have certainly heard of the *gecekondus*”, he noted. “Mr Abens mentioned them briefly in his report. These are tiny, often



rudimentary houses constructed illegally, typically in a single night, by peasants who settle in Istanbul without prior planning permission. The problem is now more than thirty years old. Initially, it was not taken very seriously, but today it represents a real threat.”

İlhan emphasised that these dwellings were being erected across the city, including in the heart of the historic peninsula, on the scenic hills of the Bosphorus, and in peripheral districts. “I am sure you can imagine the problems this creates, particularly in terms of schooling and sanitation.” In response to this growing challenge, he proposed transferring some of Istanbul’s industrial activity to other cities and called for a new urban planning strategy. For İlhan, decentralisation was the only viable solution to safeguard Istanbul’s cultural and archaeological heritage.

Another member of the Turkish delegation, Mustafa Üstündağ (CHP), stressed the urgency of the situation and echoed the report’s warning that the coming three to five years would be critical for Istanbul’s cultural and historical heritage. While acknowledging the significant time and financial resources required, he urged against resignation or inaction. The stakes, he warned, were not limited to Türkiye alone:

“If these irreplaceable examples of mankind’s struggle towards civilisation are lost, it is not just Türkiye that will suffer, but all humanity.”

For Üstündağ, Istanbul’s archaeological treasures were part of the shared legacy of East and West, a bridge between Asia and Europe since the dawn of recorded history. Preserving that legacy, he argued, was vital not only for understanding Türkiye’s path to the modern republic but for understanding the broader human story—its achievements and its mistakes.

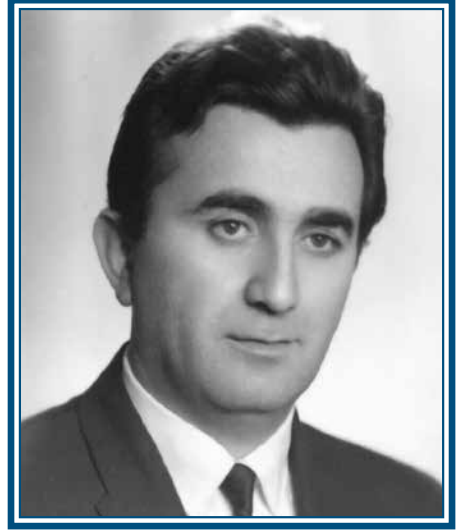
He called on the Turkish Government to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and to hold accountable those who threatened protected sites for profit. At the same time, he encouraged greater creativity and ambition in preservation strategies. He cited, for example, a proposal from a professor at the University of Istanbul to repurpose



the city's historic wooden houses as student accommodation—a concept he believed deserved full support. Türkiye, he affirmed, was fully aware of its responsibility and had already allocated funds in its 1976, 1977, and 1978 budgets. Yet he was clear that the scale of the task required broader international co-operation. He strongly supported the recommendation that UNESCO and other international organisations be engaged in the effort.

Üstündağ concluded with a powerful appeal to his fellow parliamentarians. If European countries stood in solidarity with Türkiye, future generations could inherit not just the physical remains of the past, but the inspiration and understanding they offer. “These monuments”, he reminded the Assembly, “are not merely Türkiye’s—they belong to every nation represented here.” He called on the Council of Europe to mobilise international opinion and resources so that Istanbul’s heritage might endure as a testament to the shared civilisation of Europe and beyond.

Greek parliamentarian Konstantin Stavropulos expressed his support for the resolution but raised concerns about the way the report referred to the city. He noted that while the report was generally well written, it created “a misleading ambiguity” by referring to the city simply as “Istanbul” without acknowledging its historical layers. He told the Assembly that the name *Istanbul* derives from the Greek phrase meaning ‘to the city’ and that it only officially replaced *Constantinople* in 1923, following the reforms of Kemal Atatürk. Citing a publication distributed during the session by the Turkish delegation—whose articles referenced Byzantium, Constantinople, and Istanbul—Stavropulos argued that the city’s long and multicultural past should be made more explicit. He warned that omitting these earlier names and histories could have unintended consequences and called instead for a more



Mustafa Üstündağ,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
1970–1971, 1973–
1974, 1976–1977



comprehensive and historically grounded approach to preserving Istanbul's heritage.

In response to Stavropulos, Franz Karasek took the floor to offer a conciliatory but firm reply. As Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education, he affirmed the committee's broad and inclusive understanding of Istanbul's layered history:

"Everything in Istanbul is worth preserving. It is a historic city in which, over the course of centuries, several cultures have been superimposed on others. It would be wrong for people as committed as we are to the protection of monuments to ignore any century of this history or any cultural influence which has left its mark on the place, we today call Istanbul."

Referring to the city's changing names over time—Byzantium, Constantinople, and Istanbul—Karasek underscored the symbolism of this evolution and the importance of recognising the full breadth of its heritage.

The debate on the protection of Istanbul's architectural heritage culminated in the unanimous adoption of a resolution—passed by a show of hands, without any amendments. This rare consensus in the Assembly underscored a broad, cross-national recognition that the safeguarding of Istanbul's historic fabric was not simply a domestic Turkish issue, but one of European and even global concern.

The resolution described the city's heritage as "unique in Europe" and emphasised the urgency of action, warning that delays could lead to the irreversible loss of entire ensembles of cultural, historical, and artistic significance. While welcoming the Turkish Government's initial efforts, particularly in relation to the preservation of Ottoman-era wooden neighbourhoods, the Assembly called for the more rigorous implementation of existing laws and planning regulations. It urged both local and national authorities to take bolder steps and encouraged European cultural organisations—and UNESCO in particular—to lend their support. Reaffirming the principles of integrated conservation as outlined in the European Charter of the



Architectural Heritage and the Declaration of Amsterdam, the Assembly framed the protection of Istanbul as a shared European responsibility. In the spirit of solidarity, it called for greater public awareness, technical co-operation, and the mobilisation of financial resources. With this resolution, the Council of Europe signalled not only its support for Türkiye's preservation efforts, but also its belief that Istanbul's layered heritage—from Byzantium to Constantinople to the modern metropolis—belongs to the collective memory of all European civilisation.

As the debate closed, Vice-President Frederik Pilet offered a final word that echoed the Assembly's sentiment: "Istanbul really constitutes a treasure for this Europe of ours. We are all very glad to have received the beautifully produced work on Istanbul which now enriches our library." His remarks served as a fitting conclusion to a discussion that united diverse voices in a shared commitment to protecting one of Europe's most storied and symbolically charged cities.

Democratic disruptions: coups and Turkish-European relations

Few developments have tested Türkiye's evolving relationship with the Council of Europe more seriously than its military interventions—above all, the 1980 coup. Since becoming a founding member in 1949, Türkiye had positioned itself within the European democratic framework, contributing actively to the Council's political, legal, and cultural agendas. However, this trajectory was not without setbacks. The military interventions of 1960 and 1971, carried out in the name of preserving order during periods of domestic instability, temporarily disrupted Türkiye's democratic progress and raised concerns in Strasbourg. Even so, dialogue between Ankara and the Council of Europe remained open, and Türkiye continued to participate in European institutions.

The 1980 coup, however, represented a more profound rupture. For an organisation grounded in the defence of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, the suspension of constitutional government in a member state demanded scrutiny. The intervention not only dismantled democratic institutions but also intensified European anxieties that Türkiye was drifting away from the values it had pledged to uphold. The shock was deeply felt in Strasbourg. It sparked urgent debate, triggered calls to reassess Türkiye's status within the Council, and ushered in a period of diplomatic strain.

Yet the crisis also underscored the enduring relevance of the Council of Europe as a platform for engagement and reform. The difficult discussions that followed reflected not a breakdown but a recalibration of expectations—a moment when Türkiye's European partners reaffirmed their hopes for the country's democratic restoration. The legacy of 1980 remains complex, but it also marks a turning point in the long, sometimes fraught, yet ultimately resilient relationship between Türkiye and the European institutional order.



27 May 1960: the first wound in the Parliamentary Assembly

On Wednesday, 21 September 1960, at 3:05 p.m., Per Federspiel, the Danish President of the Parliamentary Assembly, opened the Assembly's autumn plenary session in Strasbourg. The previous session had been held during the week of 25–29 April 1960. In the meantime, a major political rupture had occurred: the Turkish Armed Forces had seized power on 27 May. As a result, the Turkish delegation was absent from the September session.

Before the coup, the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly had consisted entirely of members of the Democrat Party, then the ruling party in Türkiye. Delegates included Basri Aktaş, Halim Alyot, Ragıp Hamdi Atademir, Hamdi Bozbağ, Baki Erden, Osman Kapani, Mehmet Karasan, Kasım Küfrevi, İsmail Şener, and Nazlı Tılabar. Following the coup, all were arrested.

The absence of the Turkish delegation was immediately noted by Assembly members. One of the first to react was Roberto Lucifero d'Aprigliano, an Italian monarchist and long-time friend of Turkish parliamentarians, who raised the issue at the opening of the session. In response, President Federspiel expressed his concern and shared details of a recent phone conversation with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to the information provided, the trials of the detained representatives—accused of violating the Turkish Constitution—were expected to begin in September.

The Turkish authorities had reportedly committed to ensuring that the proceedings would be public, with full rights of defence. The accused would be allowed to choose legal counsel not only from Türkiye but also from abroad. The trials would be held before a judicial tribunal composed of three judges from the Supreme Court, three from the Council of State (administrative court), and three civilian judges serving within the military judiciary. It was also confirmed that the Council of Europe would be permitted to send observers to the trials. President Federspiel concluded, "That is all the information I can give the Assembly at present."



Socialist Belgian parliamentarian Georges Bohy then took the floor. While he made it clear that he did not wish to interfere in Türkiye's internal affairs, he raised a concern regarding parliamentary immunity. According to him, the Turkish representatives to the Parliamentary Assembly had enjoyed immunity as European parliamentarians prior to the 27 May coup. For this reason, he and his Socialist colleagues considered it unacceptable to admit any new delegation from Türkiye until fresh democratic elections were held.

Speaking on behalf of the Christian Democrat Group, Austrian conservative parliamentarian Lujo Tonic-Sorinj struck a careful balance between legal precision and diplomatic tact. While reiterating that his group did not wish to see relations between Türkiye and Europe suffer, he firmly underlined that the Assembly was bound by its own legal framework. In his view, and in accordance with Article 25 of the Council of Europe's Statute, the Assembly could not legally recognise a provisional delegation, nor appoint observers or substitutes in its place. "The Turkish delegation that existed before the military regime", he stated, "remains the only legal delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly".

Tonic-Sorinj went on to urge the Turkish authorities to understand and respect the legal constraints facing the Council of Europe. "What we are now requesting", he explained, "is that the Turkish Government shall understand the legal necessities with which the Council of Europe is faced". He argued that framing the issue strictly in legal terms was the best way to avoid any political misunderstanding or unnecessary tension between the two sides. "We are far from expressing any criticism about the internal affairs of Türkiye", he stressed. "Nor do we have the right to do so—or the possibility. But the Council of Europe must insist that its Statute be observed." The responsibility, he concluded, fell on all member governments to comply with the rules and regulations of the Organisation they had voluntarily joined.

Swedish parliamentarian Gunnar Heckscher delivered one of the most thoughtful and principled interventions in the



debate. He began by paying tribute to the absent Turkish parliamentarians, recalling their valuable contributions to the Assembly and its committees, and describing them as “true Europeans” imbued with the spirit of European co-operation. He then voiced serious concern over the stance taken by the provisional Turkish authorities, particularly their assumption of collective guilt towards the members of the dissolved Grand National Assembly of Türkiye — the Turkish Parliament. For Heckscher, such an approach was fundamentally at odds with the values and legal standards upheld by the Council of Europe.

While acknowledging that the previous regime in Türkiye had committed actions inconsistent with democratic norms, Heckscher firmly rejected the treatment of the Turkish parliamentarians following the coup. Their arrests and the unilateral termination of their mandates, he argued, violated not only the Turkish Constitution but also the principles of the Council of Europe. From a juridical standpoint, he insisted, the mandates of the Turkish members remained valid. “We cannot for juridical reasons—and also, perhaps, for other reasons—accept their claim to terminate the mandate of the previous members”, he stated. At the same time, Heckscher expressed his admiration for the Turkish people and made clear his wish to see Türkiye return to the Parliamentary Assembly through democratic elections. Until that time, he cautioned, the Assembly could not take a definitive stance, as its judgment must rest on more complete information and firm evidence of a genuine return to democratic governance.

Following this brief but significant debate, President Federspiel informed the Assembly that no formal motion had been tabled regarding the situation in Türkiye. He clarified that the matter would instead be referred to the Bureau of the Assembly — the executive body composed of the President, Vice-Presidents, the Chairpersons of the political groups, and the Chairs of the general Parliamentary Assembly committees. Thus concluded the first debate in the Parliamentary Assembly concerning a military coup in the modern Republic of Türkiye — and, more broadly, the first such debate in the history of a Western democratic



institution about a military takeover in one of its member states.

Although the European Convention on Human Rights had already entered into force several years earlier, the Council of Europe had not yet developed a fully embedded institutional culture of human rights. Notably, the Parliamentary Assembly did not question the democratic legitimacy of the Turkish military intervention of 27 May 1960. At that stage, its principal concern was limited to the status and immunity of its Turkish members prior to the coup.

The matter was subsequently taken up by the Standing Committee — comprising members of the Parliamentary Assembly Bureau and the chairpersons of national delegations — which convened on 1 March 1961 to review the status of the imprisoned Turkish parliamentarians. A fact sheet was prepared at the conclusion of the meeting and, later that same day, read out in the plenary sitting by French parliamentarian Émile Liquard, serving as Rapporteur of the Bureau and the Standing Committee. The fact sheet confirmed that ten former Turkish members of the Parliamentary Assembly had been imprisoned following the coup. It also recorded that the Turkish Government had failed to honour its earlier commitment to allow Council of Europe observers to attend the trials being held on Yassıada Island — located in the Sea of Marmara, just off the coast of Istanbul — where former Democrat Party leaders, including Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, were being tried. A renewed request was reportedly submitted to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for permission to send a Parliamentary Assembly representative to observe the proceedings.

Presenting his report on behalf of the Bureau and the Standing Committee, Liquard reviewed the developments that followed what he described as the “Turkish revolution” of 27 May 1960. He recalled that ten Turkish members of the Assembly — along with other deputies from the now-dissolved Grand National Assembly of Türkiye — had been arrested in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Since



then, the President of the Assembly had remained in regular contact with the new Turkish authorities, seeking to secure the restoration of Türkiye's representation in the Parliamentary Assembly in accordance with the Statute of the Council of Europe.

Liquid reported that the Turkish Government had declared its intention to re-establish democratic rights and freedoms, and to restore the rule of law as soon as possible. On the one hand, the Assembly sought assurances that the principles of the Statute and the European Convention on Human Rights were being upheld — particularly in relation to the treatment of the detained Turkish parliamentarians. On the other hand, the Standing Committee expressed regret that a request to allow a Parliamentary Assembly observer to attend the Yassıada trials had been denied by the Turkish authorities.

In February 1961, the President of the Assembly had submitted a renewed request to the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, again urging the government to permit an Assembly representative to observe the trials. A note verbale dated 28 February, setting out the Turkish Government's position, was transmitted to the Secretary General and distributed to Assembly members as official document 1246.

Given the absence of any representative from the Turkish constitutional authorities at the current part-session, the Standing Committee proposed that the Assembly merely take note of the information presented. It further recommended that the President of the Assembly write to the Turkish Foreign Minister to extend a formal invitation to attend the opening of the Assembly's forthcoming 13th Session — in the hope that either the minister himself or another member of the Turkish Government might agree to address the Assembly directly.

The Standing Committee invited the new Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Selim Sarper, to speak before the Assembly. Sarper, however, declined the invitation, citing the heavy demands of his office. Notably, he would later serve as a member of the Assembly himself between



1963 and 1965. In the meantime, debates within the Parliamentary Assembly intensified over the fate of the former Turkish members.

On 2 March 1961, during a plenary sitting, Belgian Socialist parliamentarian Fernand Dehousse — a long-standing friend of Türkiye — expressed his growing alarm:

“I have the honour to be one of Türkiye’s friends. But we cannot, whatever our opinion of any political order, stand by and calmly watch our colleagues being imprisoned without doing something about it.”

He was followed by Italian parliamentarian Roberto Lucifero, known for his uncompromising opposition to the 27 May “revolution”. Lucifero argued that the Assembly had a moral obligation towards the Turkish parliamentarians from the dissolved Democrat Party:

“A revolution has its rights, which include the right to lie. But we also have a right — the right to know the truth. Well, here it is. Our former colleagues are not in a good state. It is enough to look at their photographs in today’s Turkish newspapers and compare those with their appearance when we knew them. It is impossible to recognise some of them, despite the names printed beneath. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Turkish representatives remain members of this Assembly until the Assembly itself waives their immunity. We have said that ourselves, and the Standing Committee has confirmed it.”

Later that year, Türkiye came under sharp criticism during the Assembly’s autumn session. The execution of former Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan deeply shocked the members of the Council of Europe. Just three years earlier, Zorlu had visited Strasbourg in his capacity as Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers — a reminder of how recently he had stood at the heart of the European project.

On 25 September 1961, during a plenary debate, Austrian Socialist parliamentarian Karl Czernetz delivered a blistering speech:



"We hoped then that the Turkish military revolution government would keep its promise to institute regular legal proceedings and arrange for early elections. We did not want to interfere with that development. Assuredly, we were very unhappy about that mass show-trial involving hundreds of accused; we were unhappy about the hotchpotch of accusations mixed up with charges of corruption, criminal acts, breaches of the constitution, high treason, etc. We were unhappy that the proposal for an official legal observer from the Council of Europe to attend the trial was flatly refused. Even Stalin admitted to the Moscow show-trials observers from the free world, official observers from organisations of the West. All these facts give me a feeling of deep sadness and bitterness."

Czernetz concluded by stating that the trial had ended with 15 executions, 39 life sentences, and 418 prison terms ranging from two to fifteen years — most of them handed down to former members of the Grand National Assembly. He offered a stark warning:

"We must give the Turks a friendly warning: death sentences will not facilitate development towards democracy. The road towards democracy must not be lined with gallows. We heard so much palaver about the policy of violence pursued by communist dictatorships, and we talk a lot about Soviet imperialism. If we are not to fatally prejudice our position as advocates of freedom and democracy, then we must speak out also about these tragic happenings."

Despite the forceful speeches delivered by several parliamentarians and the execution of Türkiye's former Prime Minister and two ministers — all well-known figures within the Council of Europe — the Parliamentary Assembly ultimately refrained from adopting any resolution condemning the military coup.

Following general elections held in Türkiye on 15 October 1961, a new delegation was appointed by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and took its seats at the Council of Europe for the first time on 16 January 1962. The new Turkish delegation was composed of Kasım Gülek (CHP), the most experienced among them, along with Sabahattin Adalı and Fahrettin Kerim Gökay (both from the New Türkiye Party, YTP), Celal Tevfik Karasapan



and Yusuf Ziya Yücebilgin (Republican Villagers Nation Party, CKMP), Muzaffer Döşemeci, Celal Ertuğ, and Mehmet Yavaş (Justice Party, AP), and Oğuz Oran and Fethi Ülkü (CHP). Both the Justice Party (AP) and the New Türkiye Party (YTP) had been established after the coup of 27 May 1960 to fill the political vacuum left by the banned Democrat Party, which had dominated Turkish politics throughout the 1950s under the leadership of the now-executed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes.

At the opening of the 1962 winter session, Parliamentary Assembly President Federspiel welcomed the new Turkish delegation. In his remarks, he expressed the hope that the punishments imposed on former Turkish parliamentarians — sentenced primarily for their political affiliations — might be mitigated in due course. The Assembly then proceeded to the formal examination of the credentials of the new Turkish delegation. While the Assembly's Credentials Committee had already given its preliminary approval, a final vote in the plenary was still required.

Kasım Gülek,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
1949–1950, 1951,
1958–1959, 1962–
1963, 1965–1966,
1967–1968





Before the vote, Federspiel granted the floor to Kasım Gülek, president of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly and a member of the CHP—a social-democratic, Kemalist party that had recently won the elections. In a carefully worded speech, Gülek openly defended the 27 May 1960 military coup, characterising it as a revolution:

“There has been a revolution in Türkiye. In the life of almost all nations, revolutions have taken place. Many understand and will show appreciation of what revolution means.”

He assured the Assembly that discussions on amnesty for the imprisoned former parliamentarians were ongoing and being approached with seriousness. Emphasising the legitimacy of the post-coup transition, he declared that “those who made the revolution have turned over power, gracefully and entirely, to the democratically constituted parliament of the nation”.

Gülek underscored that a Constituent Assembly had drafted a new constitution, which had been adopted through a national referendum, and that free and fair elections had since restored parliamentary life in Türkiye. He concluded by reaffirming Türkiye’s strong commitment to the Council of Europe:

“We believe in this Council [of Europe]. We believe in the path which the Council is following, and we believe that the Council is undertaking an important task for Europe, for the unification of Europe. We, the Turkish delegation, will do our best to be useful in the work of the Council of Europe.”

Following Gülek’s speech, new members of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly—Celal Ertuğ, Celal Tevfik Karasapan, and Fahrettin Kerim Gökay—also expressed their support for the military coup in their addresses. Italian parliamentarian Lucifero, however, was displeased with their stance. He announced that he would abstain from voting as a gesture of solidarity with the former Turkish delegation. Despite this, the credentials of the new Turkish delegation were overwhelmingly approved by the Assembly.



After the vote, Gülek responded directly to Lucifero, saying, "I should like to address my old friend, Mr. Lucifero, whom I have known for many years in this Assembly. I know he is interested in Türkiye and closely follows its affairs. Yet, I regret that he chose to speak as he did about our credentials. I wish he had not, especially since there have been prior instances of violations of liberty before this Assembly where Mr. Lucifero remained silent. I once represented the Turkish opposition in this Assembly, and he said nothing when I was imprisoned, nor when my election was blocked by the then majority. But all that belongs to the past, and we do not wish to dwell on it now. I was one of the founding members of this Assembly. I was present in 1949 when the Council of Europe was established, and this Assembly formed. I consider myself a veteran member and part of this great endeavour. I have dedicated a significant part of my life and effort to the success of this Assembly."

Lucifero, who had chosen not to respond to Kasım Gülek's remarks in the morning sitting, returned to the matter later that afternoon. Taking the floor, he stated, "I can answer now, that had I been present when he was arrested, or had I even known, I should certainly, as he is well aware, have intervened just as energetically as I did on behalf of his colleagues." Lucifero continued to raise the issue of the imprisoned former parliamentarians from the Democrat Party, notably during the spring part-session in May 1962. His persistence appeared to irritate Gülek, who replied with diplomatic restraint, "I do not doubt the sincerity of my friend Mr Lucifero, but he seems to make a hobby of taking up the Turkish problem at the beginning of every session."

Tensions between the two resurfaced during the plenary debates of September 1962. At the time, Gülek was serving as one of the Vice-Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly and Rapporteur for the Bureau and Standing Committee's activity report. Presenting his report on 19 September, he noted that the Permanent Committee had discussed the fate of former Turkish parliamentarians from the Democratic Party and the prospect of a general amnesty. Gülek reported that the issue had been placed



on the agenda of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and that a draft bill was expected to be submitted the following month. According to his statement, two former Turkish members of the Parliamentary Assembly had already been released, and further releases were anticipated depending on the outcome of parliamentary discussions regarding the amnesty.

Following the presentation of the activity report, Lucifero took the floor with his characteristic irony:

“Forgive my saying so, Mr. Gülek, but there is an Italian proverb which says: *Se son rose fioriranno* — ‘if they are roses, they will blossom.’ Nevertheless, we have been waiting a long time to see these roses blossom. We have already been given many promises, which have not been kept. Our President paid a personal visit to your country to ensure that the agreement concerning the Assembly was properly respected. Indeed, a governmental crisis was caused in your country by this very same question of amnesty. You must therefore allow me to observe that, after our past experience, while your declarations may perhaps represent some degree of hope for us all — and of course for yourself — they in no sense reflect a certainty. You have now put a limit on the imprisonment of our colleagues. To be sure, this is not the first time you have done so. I hope, however, it will be the last. ‘Next month,’ you said, Mr. Gülek. [...] I should be extremely obliged if you would give us the names of our two Turkish colleagues who have been released.”

Gülek then gave the names of the two former parliamentarians who had been released: Kasım Küfrevi and Mehmet Karasan. Responding diplomatically, he stated:

“A revolution in any country — as nearly all of you have experienced in your own — raises difficult and delicate problems. Every effort is made to solve them, but it takes time. Although it has taken time in Türkiye, you may rest assured that we have done everything possible to ensure that the roses of which Mr. Lucifero spoke will come into flower. We are well acquainted with this problem, which Mr. Lucifero raises at every session, and we are prepared



for it. I firmly hope that at the next session we shall be able to announce some definite results. Mr. Lucifero will therefore no longer need to raise the question. Naturally, he will be at liberty to raise it again. He also has the right to table a motion."

Lucifero interrupted, declaring, "It is my duty!"

Gülek responded: "Perhaps we shall have to consider this problem not only as a Turkish problem, because if we are going to table motions concerning the internal affairs of member countries—"

Lucifero cut in again: "It is not a question of internal affairs of member countries, but of members of our Assembly."

Gülek replied, "If we begin tabling resolutions concerning the internal affairs of member countries, several nations represented here might be affected. If it is in the interest of the Assembly, we shall do so, and we shall raise these problems at the appropriate time."

This final exchange effectively closed the chapter on the heated disputes between the two parliamentarians over the military coup of 27 May 1960. Nevertheless, Lucifero's concern and respect for his Turkish colleagues remained undiminished. Over six years later, on 26 September 1967, during a plenary debate concerning the Greek military junta, he invoked their memory with poignant words:

"We are now talking about Greece, but I would like to refer to what happened in Türkiye, and it was perhaps fate that decreed that the son of a great patriot and a good friend of mine, who was assassinated without the Assembly raising a single voice in protest, should preside over yesterday's sitting."

The person to whom Lucifero alluded was Yüksel Menderes of the Justice Party, the son of the executed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. Since 1966, Yüksel Menderes had served as a member of the Turkish delegation to the Assembly, and by that time had been elected one of its Vice-Presidents — a symbolic and moving testament to the enduring legacy of his father within the Council of Europe.



12 March 1971: Türkiye's image is changing

The 23rd ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly took place on 10–14 May 1971. At the time, the President of the Assembly was Olivier Reverdin, a Swiss parliamentarian from the Liberal Group. A report prepared by the Political Affairs Committee, entitled *The current situation in the Mediterranean and Middle East*, was tabled on 11 May. Just two months earlier, on 12 March 1971, the Turkish Armed Forces had issued a memorandum to the government, demanding urgent reforms and effectively forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel. Despite the military intervention, members of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly attended the session. The delegation included Cevdet Akçalı, Şevket Akyürek, Nihat Bayramoğlu, Ali Döğerli, Halil Göral, Kemal Güneş, Emin Paksüt, Reşit Ülker, Mehmet Yardımcı, and Reşat Zaloğlu.

This military intervention, often described as a 'memorandum coup,' did not involve tanks or direct military rule but was an ultimatum from the army demanding a strong and credible government to restore order and implement reforms. Following Prime Minister Demirel's resignation, the commanders chose Nihat Erim on 19 March to lead a technocratic government acceptable to both the Justice Party and the conservative faction of the Republican People's Party. Erim's cabinet, drawn from outside the political establishment, was tasked with carrying out the military's socio-economic reform programme. The regime was an uneasy balance of civilian politicians and military influence, neither a normal elected government nor an outright military dictatorship.

Parliamentary Assembly President Reverdin gave the floor to Austrian rapporteur Karl Czernetz, a member of the Socialist Group, who had visited Türkiye at the request of the Political Affairs Committee and Parliamentary Assembly President to observe recent developments. Czernetz reported that he had met with Prime Minister Nihat Erim, a well-known and respected figure within the Assembly. As a former member of the Parliamentary Assembly, Nihat Erim knew the Council of Europe well.



Like his Austrian colleague Karl Czernetz, he had belonged to the Socialist Group, and the two men were already acquainted. Upon Czernetz's request, Erim arranged a bilateral meeting between him and the Chief of the General Staff, General Memduh Tağmaç, the principal architect of the 12 March military intervention.

Czernetz spent three days in Türkiye, during which he met not only government figures but also a range of actors from Turkish society, including trade unionists, journalists and representatives of academic circles. In his speech before the Assembly, he did not disclose many details of his conversation with General Tağmaç, but his remarks suggested that he had been influenced by the views of the Turkish military leadership. "Türkiye was going through a severe crisis", he explained, "with much unrest in university circles, on the campuses and in the towns. On one side there were left-wing extremists, including heavily armed Maoist elements, and on the other, right-wing extremists. What took place was an intervention on the part of the military leadership in the form of a warning, together with a demand that a new government be formed."

Czernetz then sought to distinguish the Turkish case from other recent experiences in the region, particularly the military junta in Greece:

"It is strange to see an intervention by a military leader and a group of officers who are quite different from what we are wont to look upon as such and from what we met with in Greece. Indeed, historically speaking, the Kemalist army and its predecessors back in the time of the Ottoman Empire were champions of the cause of democracy, and this in the midst of the colossal difficulties facing this country, which still has to carry out extremely far-reaching reforms in order to achieve Western standards."

Czernetz had also met with İsmet İnönü and Süleyman Demirel during his visit. İnönü, a senior statesman of the Republic, had served alongside Atatürk during the War of Independence, later becoming Türkiye's chief negotiator at the Treaty of Lausanne and, following Atatürk's death,



the country's second President (1938–1950). Since the 1950s, he had continued his political career as the leader of the CHP and head of the opposition. Czernetz referred to him in Strasbourg as the "Grand Old Man of Turkish democracy."

Demirel, representing a younger generation of politicians, had begun his political ascent in the early 1960s within the Justice Party (AP), a liberal-conservative movement that positioned itself as the successor to the Democrat Party. After winning the general elections of 1965 and 1969, he served as prime minister until his forced resignation in the aftermath of the 12 March memorandum. Czernetz relayed Demirel's own account of the events to the Assembly:

"This intervention was not provided for in the constitution, but we have to accept it as a fact, and we support the present government which is not a coalition but is intended to rally all forces together so as to carry out the necessary reform."

On that day, Nihat Bayramoğlu of the AP was the first—and only—Turkish parliamentarian to speak publicly about the military intervention of 12 March. "Because of their traditions, their desire for freedom, their way of life and of thought", he declared before the Assembly, "the Turkish people will remain firmly attached to the free West and to the principles of democracy." The intervention itself was not formally debated in the Assembly, largely because its members lacked sufficient information at the time to engage in a substantive discussion.

When the Assembly reconvened for its autumn session on 4 October 1971, its President, Olivier Reverdin, addressed the chamber with observations from his recent visit to Türkiye. During his stay, he had met with Prime Minister Nihat Erim and Vice Prime Minister Sadi Koçuş, noting that he had shared a long car journey with Koçuş, a former Parliamentary Assembly member in 1970. Without painting a bleak picture, Reverdin nonetheless expressed a sense of unease:

"We have reason to be concerned about what has been happening in Türkiye since the crisis last March, but I have



come back convinced that two of our own former colleagues [Nihat Erim and Sadi Koçuş], as well as other members of their government, are endeavouring—thus far with real success—to preserve democratic institutions. We attended more than one debate in parliament, whose business was conducted normally, and as always on such occasions, had the pleasure of recognising familiar faces in the lobbies, those of our colleagues and of our former colleagues. We were able to appreciate the importance Türkiye attaches to her links with the Council [of Europe], and we learnt that a number of the verdicts brought in by the special courts set up under martial law, particularly those involving journalists, had been quashed, and the cases sent back to the civil courts.”

Reverdin’s remarks were met with silence. No questions were raised about the military intervention itself. Yet the state of siege still in effect in several Turkish cities, along with the continued imprisonment of journalists and intellectuals, had already begun to echo through the corridors of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Interestingly, criticism from Assembly members did not focus on the 12 March intervention *per se*, but rather on the measures and consequences that followed. The Parliamentary Assembly was increasingly being informed not only by the Turkish delegation but also by those directly affected by the military authorities.

By May 1972, the tone of Assembly debates had become markedly more critical of the Turkish Government. That same month, Türkiye assumed the rotating Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, a position it held until December that year. Traditionally, this role came with increased visibility and diplomatic engagement. It was customary for the foreign minister of the chairing country to attend meetings of the Committee of Ministers and to address the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly—a gesture widely seen as both a symbolic and substantive reaffirmation of the country’s commitment to the Council of Europe’s values. On this occasion, the Turkish Foreign Minister was due to present the Committee of Ministers’ activity report before the Assembly plenary.



At the time, Haluk Bayülken served as Türkiye's Minister of Foreign Affairs. A seasoned diplomat with extensive experience, he addressed the Parliamentary Assembly for the first time on 16 May 1972 in his capacity as Chair of the Committee of Ministers. The chamber was packed; there was no space left in the visitors' tribune.

As Bayülken took the floor, his speech was immediately interrupted by shouts: "Release the political prisoners" and "Türkiye out of the Council of Europe". The sitting was presided over by Giuseppe Vedovato, an Italian Christian Democrat and long-standing member of the Assembly. Startled by the disruption, Vedovato urged order and invited Bayülken to proceed. Once the shouting subsided, the Turkish minister calmly resumed with a pointed remark: "That is democracy."

Yet despite the atmosphere in the chamber, Bayülken's speech made no reference to the domestic situation in Türkiye. Instead, he chose to underscore the strength and continuity of Turkish parliamentary life:

A Turkish diplomatic delegation led by Minister of Foreign Affairs Haluk Bayülken in Strasbourg during Türkiye's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, 15 May–14 December 1972





"Türkiye is one of the very rare countries of its region, which is the south-east flank of Europe, to uphold the ideals of parliamentary democracy which constitute the principles of the Council of Europe. Türkiye stands like an island of democracy—I repeat, like an island—in the middle of an ocean of regimes which are not of the same character. One has indeed to travel far in any direction to arrive at another country where parliamentary democracy exists. I am sure that the dedication of Türkiye to parliamentary democracy and the efforts it makes for the safeguard of freedoms are duly appreciated by members of the Assembly."

He concluded by referring to a recent visit to Türkiye by members of the Assembly's Political Affairs Committee, who, he claimed, had witnessed first-hand the functioning of democratic institutions.

Following his address, the floor was opened for questions. The first to intervene was the Swedish Social Democrat Kaj Åke Björk, who raised the issue of death sentences handed down to political prisoners in Türkiye. Bayülken responded with rhetorical caution, deflecting the specific concern. Instead of engaging directly, he placed Türkiye within a broader historical and civilisational frame:

"In Atatürk's Türkiye, for the last fifty years since the foundation of the Republic, my country has provided proof of practising the rule of law, searching for international co-operation and implementing the most advanced ideals of Europe, as Europe then represented 'civilisation'. You will recall, Mr. President, that many laws of the newly born Turkish Republic have been followed by friendly European countries. [...] Severe punishment is disliked by everyone. I have tried to describe our democracy, the rule of law and the differentiation of powers between the three bodies—the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. If a country, be it Türkiye or any other, finds itself fighting for the survival of democracy and, even more importantly, facing threats to its national unity, and if a democratically constituted assembly applies national laws which do not breach the Statute of the Council of Europe, I hope Mr.



Björk will understand the dilemma in which we find ourselves. I sincerely hope that none of the Council of Europe's other member countries will find themselves at any time in a similar situation."

Unconvinced by Bayülken's rhetorical detour, Björk took the floor once again. He pointed to what he described as contradictory signals coming from Ankara, then read aloud a public statement made by Süleyman Demirel, published in an English-language newspaper:

"Normality could come about with the restoration of democracy. The only way for this is elections. We are walking towards this direction. We will restore democracy, whatever the cost."

Björk concluded with a firm but measured critique:

"If the systematic application of torture in criminal cases could be proved, as it has sometimes been alleged, then such a matter might be brought before the Committee of Human Rights. Probably I would not see eye to eye with Mr. Demirel on the methods to achieve a true, vital and dynamic democracy in Türkiye, but I certainly share his desire for a restoration of democracy. I am convinced that all members of this Assembly have the same desire."

Björk's intervention did not go unanswered. Douglas Dodds-Parker, a British Conservative and member of the Political Affairs Committee, took the floor to defend the Turkish Government. As a participant in the official visit to Türkiye, he was clearly irritated by the Swedish delegate's remarks:

"I cannot allow the remarks of our colleague Mr. Björk to pass without making one remark about them. I also took part in the Turkish visit as a member of the Political Affairs Committee. I found it enjoyable, interesting and encouraging, and when our Chairman, Mr. Blumenfeld, said that democracy in Türkiye is still dynamic, I certainly agreed with him, and the excellent report by our colleague, Mr. Leynen, which has been circulated today, will bear that out. Having, in the past, had something to do with the



constitutions of new countries, I have some idea of the time it takes to establish what one might call Swedish standards of democracy, and I think that, on the basis of our standards, it was only in 1950 that they had the first free election in Türkiye as we would understand the term. I found it encouraging to see the wide area of agreement there was among all the political leaders whom we were fortunate enough to see, two of whom were former colleagues of ours in Strasbourg.”

The debate resumed on 19 May, with Karl Czernetz again addressing the Assembly. His long-standing knowledge of Turkish affairs and his moderate tone had earned him both respect and criticism. In his own country, he noted, he was sometimes labelled a “supporter of the Turkish military dictatorship”. Speaking in a personal capacity, Czernetz offered a nuanced assessment of the political situation in Türkiye:

“In my own, very personal view, the country needs a great many reforms. Judging by the conversations we had, my impression is that the parliament is on the conservative side. When he pressed for reforms, in his conversation with Mr. Demirel, the former Prime Minister, our friend Sir John had the unpleasant experience of being virtually labelled a communist [...] The army and the officers are pressing for reforms. By tradition, the army is progressive and democratic. It now represents a pressure group, a stronger pressure group than the army in any other country does. The position is that described to me last year, and again this year, by İnönü. His words to me were: ‘I’ve always told the generals, you know nothing about politics and you’re not going to govern, leave it alone!’ I told him it was a pity that he could not bring the colonels in Greece round to his way of thinking. But, at any rate, it was his opinion that the army did not want to govern in Türkiye. [...] What we now have, in my view, is not a military dictatorship nor a second Greece, but a country in which, as Ecevit, the new leader of the CHP, expressed to me in a private conversation, democracy is impeded. It is our concern and our sincere wish that parliamentary democracy



may survive, that it may be strengthened and become a fully effective system."

It was becoming increasingly clear that the main resistance to reform in Türkiye stemmed not from the military but from within the political class itself. This impression was echoed by Sir John Rogers, a British Conservative, who observed:

"My acquaintance with Türkiye is short, but my deep impression is that the army, which, as has been said, is a great reformist power and a new form of democracy, is leaning over backwards not to take over the civil power but to try to achieve a strong government which will be respected and which will follow a programme of reform. The reluctance to proceed with basic reforms which are urgently necessary in Türkiye appears to come more from politicians than from the army."

At the close of the debate, the President of the Political Affairs Committee, German Christian Democrat Erik Bernhard Blumenfeld, addressed the Assembly with a forceful defence of Turkish democracy. Like Czernetz, he had come under criticism for supporting Türkiye's democratic institutions but remained unapologetic:

"I shall not keep silent if it comes to supporting the democratic political institutions and leaders of a country such as Türkiye, who are, as we have all witnessed, trying to keep democracy alive in that country under very difficult circumstances."

He criticised those who commented from a distance, without direct experience of the situation on the ground:

"I address my remarks specifically to those who sit back comfortably in democratic countries, thousands of miles away, surrounded by friendly, democratic neighbours, speaking the same language more or less. [...] I shall not keep silent because press commentators advise me to do so, because they have only one-sided information and have never been on the spot. I shall not keep silent because a colleague or a parliamentarian advises me to do so, on the basis of the different views he holds."



The debate resumed at the October plenary session. On 23 October 1972, human rights in Türkiye dominated the agenda. The Assembly was divided between those who believed serious violations were occurring and those advocating leniency, citing Türkiye's difficult domestic situation. Most of the criticism came from left-wing parliamentarians. Among them was Dutch Socialist Pieter Dankert, who was the first to raise the issue formally in the Assembly. This marked the beginning of what would become a defining theme in his political career. Through his work in the Parliamentary Assembly, Dankert went on to become a member of the Türkiye-EEC Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in 1978. He chaired the European Parliament between 1982 and 1984 and remained a member of the JPC until 1999.

In his first intervention on Türkiye, Dankert acknowledged the country's internal difficulties but warned that the imposition of martial law could not be a sustainable solution. "The international press has widely reported torture in Türkiye", he stated. "And from what I have seen in sworn affidavits, in court declarations, in pictures and in confidential reports, I cannot avoid the conclusion that there are strong reasons to think that Türkiye is violating Article 3 of the Convention, not incidentally but almost systematically." Citing reports of over two thousand cases of torture in less than eighteen months, Dankert continued: "Writers, intellectuals, artists and politicians have been persecuted and condemned under martial law for making speeches and for other activities dating from before the introduction of martial law and which were fully lawful before March 1971."

A new Turkish member of the Assembly, Turhan Feyzioğlu, responded angrily to Dankert's remarks, which had also touched on the dissolution of the Workers Party of Türkiye (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TİP*), a socialist party, and the Kurdish question. Feyzioğlu considered Dankert's speech sympathetic to individuals he described as "terrorists". In reply to the criticism regarding the banning of TİP, he explained that the party had fractured into two factions



following the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Referring to a document Dankert had previously distributed to the Political Affairs Committee, Feyzioğlu said, “I know this document. It is a translation of a brochure entitled *File on Mahir Çayan*, referring to the radical left-wing leader of an armed revolutionary group in Türkiye.

Feyzioğlu continued with a passionate defence of Türkiye’s democratic credentials:

“As for Turkish democracy, we shall defend it ourselves! We shall defend it against terrorists and against the red dictators, Mr Dankert! We shall defend it against black fascism, but also against red fascism. We shall defend it, even at the peril of our lives. I left my job as a teacher at the age of twenty-six to defend academic freedom. I resigned from my post as rector in protest at a decision taken in 1961 by the revolutionary committee, which expelled several teachers. I risked my life to fight a military junta. In 1962, I said several times to my wife, ‘Perhaps I shall not come back home,’ for I knew that democracy was in danger. I committed my young daughter to my wife’s care and said to her, ‘You will understand me, my dear wife, I am acting to defend freedom, to defend democracy.’”

Turhan Feyzioğlu
(standing), Member
of the Parliamentary
Assembly,
1964–1967 and
1972–1975





Having exceeded the seven-minute time limit, President Vedovato asked him to conclude. Feyzioğlu ended with a final defence of his country:

“There are eight journalists in prison—that is true—among thousands of journalists. Five were convicted of insulting the President of the Republic. Is there any European country that does not prosecute its journalists when the King or Queen, or the President of the Republic is insulted? Two of them were convicted of attempting to re-establish a theological, reactionary and religious dictatorship. Yes, of course, we have problems in Türkiye. We have secularised the state; we have a secular democracy. We do not want to revert to the eighteenth century. Only one single journalist has been sentenced for extreme leftist activities. Incitement to crime is not an expression of opinion. If one tells young men of seventeen to use bombs and become guerrillas, that is not an expression of opinion, but an incitement to crime—and incitement to crime is punished in all democratic countries.”

Although Pieter Dankert wished to respond, President Vedovato was unable to grant him the floor due to the rules of debate. However, Liv Aasen, a Norwegian parliamentarian from the Socialist Group, took the opportunity to criticise Feyzioğlu’s remarks. “I feel sure some people will defend present conditions in Türkiye by placing the responsibility on those who have taken part in terrorist actions. I stress the opinion that, while terrorism must be combated, it is equally important that the chosen methods do not result in enlarging the area of lawlessness by sanctioning official acts of inhuman torture against political opponents. What is also frightening is the silencing of progressive democratic forces unconnected with terrorists. In fact, Mr Ecevit, in a speech on 9 September, said that the interim regime has used a screen of measures against urban guerrilla actions to silence, systematically, the voices of all democratic progressive forces. We cannot come here to the Council of Europe and keep silent about recent developments in Türkiye. If we learn about incidents of torture, we have a duty to raise the matter.”



Parliamentarians from the right responded swiftly to the criticisms raised by the Socialists. Paul de Clercq, a Belgian Liberal, addressed Dankert directly:

“One initial question I should like to put to you, Mr Dankert, is this: do the testimonies you refer to come from objective witnesses, or from persons involved, or from people closely associated with the cause of terrorism? [...] The fact that the Turkish Government has introduced exceptional measures, as provided for under the constitution, must be considered a natural reaction by a government whose concern and duty it is to defend the democratic institutions of its country. To counterbalance the evidence contained in Mr Dankert’s file, which was communicated to the Turkish Government, we have the reply of that government, and we have the democratic attitude of Türkiye, which has hitherto never refused to provide answers and clarifications on any political question. As far as I am concerned, therefore, there is no reason to question the government’s reply and its version of events. Instead of attacking this friendly nation and seeking to interfere unduly in the internal policy of a state which has, so far, acted entirely according to the constitution and the rules of the game in this young democracy, we must help the country. For Türkiye is in full course of development and has, for the past quarter of a century, resolutely thrown in its lot with the West. It promptly joined the Council of Europe and NATO. Türkiye and Israel, surrounded by states in which authoritarian regimes are rampant, are for us in Europe all that we still have in the Near East to uphold our cherished cause of democracy.”

Former President of the Assembly Olivier Reverdin expressed a viewpoint aligned with that of the Belgian parliamentarian. Echoing Paul de Clercq, Reverdin directly criticised the remarks made by Liv Aasen:

“Democracies are not all of the same age. Türkiye is a young democracy. We have Turkish colleagues here whom we know and esteem; we are aware that the struggle in which they are engaged—to preserve the forms of democracy—is sometimes difficult [...] We cannot expect the Turks, with their temperament, their traditions and their young democracy, to govern their country in the same way as the Norwegians, the Dutch or



the Swiss. Finally, I should like to address a few words to Mrs Aasen. At the request of the International Press Institute, I spent a fortnight in Türkiye conducting a survey on press freedom, and I returned there to continue this work. The problems are extraordinarily complex, and I would hesitate to speak of them as hastily as some have done this morning. How can someone who knows nothing of Türkiye's problems—its social structures and traditions—so recklessly level accusations against the country, simply because they have heard certain reports to which they are all too ready to lend credence? I believe those who would lure us along this path are leading the Council of Europe gradually to its destruction."

All these heated debates took place in the presence of Türkiye's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Haluk Bayülken, who at the time held the rotating Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Swedish Liberal parliamentarian Per Ahlmark took the floor to express his support for Dankert and Aasen. He noted the increasing number of reports about torture and ill-treatment in Türkiye. Ahlmark then directly addressed Bayülken:

"What I dislike is the attempt to whitewash everything that has happened on the political scene in Türkiye since March 1971 by referring to terrorists. Mr Foreign Minister, you cannot deny that political freedom in your country is much more limited than freedom in any other member country of the Council of Europe. Therefore, I want to ask you, as a responsible minister of a member nation of this Assembly, whether your country is willing to welcome a qualified delegation of judicial experts from European democracies with the task of examining accusations about limiting democratic rights in Türkiye."

As parliamentarians awaited Bayülken's response, Feyzioğlu once again requested the floor. Visibly agitated, he denounced those who criticised Türkiye as 'victims of propaganda', insisting that every country had its own specific conditions and institutional arrangements. As an example, he cited the State Security Court created in France in 1963 to combat terrorism and espionage, questioning the legitimacy of such exceptional tribunals in other Western democracies.



Haluk Bayülken,
Minister of Foreign
Affairs of Türkiye,
Chairman-in-Office
of the Committee of
Ministers, addressing
the Parliamentary
Assembly,
Strasbourg,
16 May 1972

Following Feyzioğlu's intervention, Bayülken responded with composure to Ahlmark's proposal:

"I think Mr Ahlmark was a little hasty in proposing—though I am sure he did so with good will—some sort of delegation to come to Türkiye. He must be aware that the Political Committee was in my country a few months ago and that the Economic Committee also held a meeting there. Every day, members of the Council of Europe—parliamentarians, high officials, ministers, or under-secretaries—come and go to Türkiye, so it cannot be considered a country with locked doors. The doors are not locked. If Mr. Ahlmark would like to see for himself, I suggest that he comes to Türkiye."

Most of the strongest criticism directed at Türkiye regarding the post-12 March situation came during the January 1973 plenary session of the Assembly. As the number of individuals imprisoned for political reasons increased, the European media began paying closer attention to developments in Türkiye. In view of these



concerns, on 22 January, British Labour MP and Socialist Group member Frank Judd delivered a lengthy speech during a plenary debate on the Progress Report of the Bureau, addressing the state of democracy in Türkiye, and particularly the growing number of political prisoners. He argued that the Turkish Government needed to commit itself to a return to democratic normality; otherwise, its membership in the Council of Europe could come under serious scrutiny.

From that point onward, the situation in Türkiye became a recurring concern, particularly for Nordic parliamentarians. While Turkish delegates sought to defend their government, British and Scandinavian MPs increasingly raised questions about democracy and human rights in the country. In their speeches, Scandinavian members of the Assembly often cited statements by Bülent Ecevit, leader of the Turkish Social Democrats, in support of their criticisms.

Following Frank Judd's intervention, Swedish Social Democrat Kaj Åke Björk took the floor. Björk had been among the first European parliamentarians to publicly criticise the 12 March military intervention. In his speech, he read aloud from a recent statement by Ecevit calling for democratic elections in Türkiye and added:

"One of the reasons given for the emergency powers in 1971 was that this was necessary in order to bring about certain reforms. Generally, we are not aware that such reforms have taken place, and there may be a danger that restrictions upon various freedoms in Türkiye may not help to bring about those desirable reforms but instead may prevent them. [...] We are all aware that the situation in Türkiye cannot be compared with that which faced us in Greece in 1967. Even so, we can all agree that it is in the interest of Türkiye and of the Turkish people that their friends in the rest of Europe express their concern and their worries about what is now going on in that country."

British Socialists continued to press the issue of the 12 March military regime. William Molloy asked a series of pointed questions:



"The question we must ask ourselves here is: Are the journalists of the Federal Republic of Germany telling us lies? Are the Italian journalists telling us lies? Are the Norwegian journalists telling us lies? Are the editor and staff of *The Times* of London misinforming us? Is *The New York Times* not giving us correct information? Are all these people wrong and the rulers of Türkiye right?"

Like Frank Judd, Molloy issued a stark warning: if the situation remained unresolved, Türkiye could face exclusion from the Assembly—just as Greece had previously been suspended.

Another Labour parliamentarian, Michael Stewart, reinforced this message. "If there is a stream of United Kingdom speakers in this debate," he said, "it is because we feel that we know this difficulty." He referred to the case of Northern Ireland, which had also been debated in the Assembly, albeit not with the same intensity as Greece or Türkiye.

Stewart continued:

"The reason a number of us have raised this matter today is that we feel, in the light of evidence from very reputable quarters, that the Turkish Government is in danger of moving away from necessarily stringent measures against the enemies of democracy towards that of general repression, which would permanently destroy democracy itself in the country concerned. I beg our Turkish colleagues to realise that this is the anxiety in our minds."

Responding on behalf of the Turkish delegation, Esat Kıratlıoğlu (AP), who had been appointed a permanent member in 1972, firmly rejected the suggestion that Türkiye was heading towards dictatorship:

"No one can or will be allowed to form an undemocratic government in Türkiye or set up a dictatorship. All Turkish parliamentarians would oppose this. The Turkish Parliament would fight against the establishment of a dictatorship with all its might. [...] As a Turkish Member of Parliament, I also promise you—and I believe I speak on behalf of my Turkish colleagues from the various parties—that



democracy will survive in Türkiye and that nobody will be allowed to remove the validity of the democratic constitution.”

Ultimately, it was decided to postpone the matter to a later session. In 1973, the Assembly held what would be its final round of debates on the 12 March regime. During the plenary session of 14–18 May 1973, Dutch parliamentarian Pieter Dankert returned to the issue, this time focusing on the newly created State Security Courts (*Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri*, DGM). Just a year earlier, some Turkish members of the Assembly had insisted that Türkiye would never allow such courts. But by 1973, the State Security Courts had been legalised through a constitutional amendment.

For many on the European left, this development represented a serious threat to democratic norms. Norwegian parliamentarian Liv Aasen once again raised the issue of political prisoners, asserting that the Turkish delegation’s repeated references to international conspiracies and communist threats were losing credibility. The rhetoric of defending Türkiye against “external ideologies” no longer held sway among many parliamentarians. Indeed, the tone within the Assembly had shifted. Whereas conservatives and liberals had previously adopted a more lenient stance towards Ankara, many were now withholding their support.

For the first time, divisions emerged even within the Turkish delegation itself. Mustafa Üstündağ (CHP) broke ranks and admitted:

“Some of my colleagues have said that there are no political prisoners, that they are all bank robbers, murderers, and so on. Most of them are criminals, but there are some political prisoners too.” He also made it clear that the CHP opposed the establishment of the State Security Courts.

At the conclusion of the May session, the Socialist Group proposed that the Political Affairs Committee draft a resolution on the situation in Türkiye. However, no such resolution materialised at that time. On 25 September



1973, during the presentation of the Bureau and Standing Committee's report, Assembly Vice-President Franz Karasek announced that the state of siege would end in both Ankara and Istanbul the following day. This decision, made by the Turkish Government on 13 September, was welcomed by Karasek, who expressed his appreciation.

After this juncture, the political situation in Türkiye following the 12 March 1971 military memorandum ceased to be a topic of debate within the Assembly. Yet the Council of Europe had clearly shifted its stance: from then on, it began to observe the state of democracy and human rights in Türkiye more closely. Democratisation and human rights would henceforth become essential benchmarks in Türkiye's relations with the Council of Europe. In this sense, the end of the debates on the 12 March regime also marked the beginning of a new era in Türkiye's engagement with the Council of Europe—a period in which alignment with European democratic standards became central to political dialogue.



12 September 1980: breaking point

Before becoming prime minister in 1974, 1977, and 1978, Bülent Ecevit—the leader of the CHP, Türkiye’s main social democratic force—was frequently cited in the Parliamentary Assembly, particularly by Scandinavian Social Democrats, as a leading voice of democratic opposition following the 12 March 1971 military memorandum. His rise to the premiership was seen by many in Strasbourg as a hopeful signal of Türkiye’s renewed democratic commitment.

It was in this capacity that, on 10 May 1979, Prime Minister Ecevit visited the Council of Europe and addressed the Parliamentary Assembly during a plenary debate on the role of the Council of Europe in the intensification of co-operation between the countries of Northern and Southern Europe. Ecevit had been invited to make a statement as part of this discussion, and he used the opportunity to deliver a wide-ranging address. Following his speech, he took questions from members of the Assembly.



Bülent Ecevit,
first Prime Minister
of Türkiye addressing
the Parliamentary
Assembly,
Strasbourg,
10 May 1979



Ecevit was no stranger to Strasbourg. Between April 1958 and April 1959, he had served as a member of the Assembly and had participated in the work of the Committee on Social and Health Questions. Now, as prime minister, he became the first Turkish head of government to address the Assembly in plenary session. No Turkish president or prime minister had visited the Council of Europe before him. His appearance attracted considerable attention from both the press and the parliamentarians in Strasbourg.

At 10:00 a.m., the President of the Assembly, Dutch parliamentarian Henri de Koster, introduced Ecevit to the chamber. In his short but pointed remarks, de Koster underlined the strategic importance of Türkiye in the evolving European landscape:

“In the North-South dialogue, Türkiye is well placed for making an important contribution. Türkiye also represents for Europe a voice of vital importance in the relations between the countries of Western and Eastern Europe. This is particularly true because the centre of gravity of the Council of Europe has moved closer to Türkiye, considering the return of Greece and the entry of Portugal and Spain to our organisation.”

De Koster also hinted at Türkiye’s delicate position vis-à-vis the European Economic Community, noting, “We have a mission to assist Türkiye in its relationship with our member countries, especially since some of those countries became candidates for the Community. Türkiye will continue to find the Council of Europe a useful means of communication with Community members for expressing hopes and problems.”

In his address to the Assembly, Ecevit highlighted Türkiye’s long-standing membership in the Council of Europe and its continued democratic commitment despite persistent challenges. He described the Council of Europe as a “living monument” to the member states’ attachment to democracy and a pioneering institution “constantly gaining and consolidating new grounds in the way of enriching the contents of democracy and enlarging freedoms and human rights”.



"Türkiye", he stated, "where democracy is practically of the same age as the Council of Europe, has been proud to be a member of this institution since its year of inception. She is the only country at the stage of development in which democracy has continuously survived during these three decades."

Ecevit acknowledged that democratic progress in a developing country was never linear:

"The temptation may often be aroused, in the face of such difficulties, to look for deceptive shortcuts, which unwittingly may cause the society to drift away from the course of democracy—a course that requires patience, perseverance and tolerance."

During difficult periods, Türkiye's membership in the Council of Europe, he said, had served as a "compass" that helped prevent democratic backsliding. "Democracy has survived and will survive in Türkiye", he declared, "because the Turkish society is already well beyond the point of return and because the people would not put up with any alternative regime." He closed his speech on a note of guarded optimism: "I am also hopeful that shortly, we may be in a position to end—or to reduce—the scope of martial law."

Ecevit's hope, however, would not be realised. Just over a year later, on 12 September 1980, the Turkish Armed Forces carried out a military coup—the third such intervention since the founding of the Republic. The repercussions of this coup would cast a long shadow over Türkiye's relations with the Council of Europe and the European Economic Community.

By 1980, the political landscape in Europe had dramatically changed. Respect for human rights and democratic norms had become integral to the European political identity. The Council of Europe had evolved into a leading actor in human rights diplomacy, extending its scrutiny beyond its founding members to developments in Central and Eastern Europe. Greece rejoined the organisation in 1974 following the collapse of its military junta, while Portugal and Spain became members in 1976 and 1977 respectively, after



their transitions to democracy. In this new environment, a return to military rule in Türkiye was seen as an anachronism—and a direct challenge to Europe’s evolving democratic order.

In the evolving political climate of Europe in 1980, the Parliamentary Assembly was swiftly informed of the military coup that had taken place in Türkiye on 12 September. The President of the Assembly, Henri de Koster, issued an official declaration expressing his hope that Türkiye would return to democratic rule without delay. With the Assembly’s next plenary session already scheduled for 24 September to 2 October, numerous members called for an urgent debate on the situation in Türkiye. It was soon agreed that the matter would be taken up under a dedicated agenda item entitled “The current situation in Türkiye.” The debate was scheduled for 30 September and 1 October, with the Political Affairs Committee tasked with drafting a report and resolution. Austrian parliamentarian Ludwig Steiner, representing the EPP Group, was appointed rapporteur.

At that time, the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly consisted of Cevdet Akçalı (AP), Muammer Aksoy (CHP), Uğur Alacakaptan (CHP), Hikmet Çetin (CHP), Halit Evliya (AP), Ağâh Oktay Güner (MHP), Turan Güneş (CHP), Kemal Kaçar (AP), Temel Karamollaoğlu (MSP), Oral Karaosmanoğlu (AP), Besim Üstünel (CHP), and Metin Toker (Independent Senator). Although the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye had been dissolved by the military junta, the credentials of these members of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly formally remained valid until May 1981.

Nevertheless, the generals who had seized power did not allow the full Turkish delegation to travel to Strasbourg. Only four members—Delegation President Cevdet Akçalı, Turan Güneş, Besim Üstünel, and Metin Toker—were authorised to attend the session. This selective permission immediately drew questions from other delegates: Why these four? What criteria had the junta used to allow or deny participation? Such questions would be openly raised during the forthcoming plenary session.



The context offered little comfort to the Turkish delegates. How were they expected to navigate the Assembly's scrutiny? Would they defend the coup? Would they find the courage to condemn it? In the past, during the military interventions of 27 May 1960 and 12 March 1971, Turkish members of the Parliamentary Assembly had avoided direct confrontation with the new regimes. This time was no different. The four delegates refrained from criticising the generals, but nor did they offer an outright defence of the coup. Their primary objective appeared to be to maintain Türkiye's position within the Council of Europe and to avoid any move towards exclusion or suspension. They appealed to the Assembly to adopt a considered and measured stance on the situation in Türkiye.

Some member states of the Council of Europe drew comparisons between the military coup in Türkiye and the juntas then ruling in Bolivia, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Within the Assembly itself, however, opinions on Türkiye were more nuanced and divided into three distinct camps. One group found the coup intolerable and called for the immediate suspension of Türkiye's membership. Another urged a more lenient approach, considering the country's strategic and historical importance. The largest group, which included Rapporteur Ludwig Steiner and the majority of the Political Affairs Committee, adopted an intermediate position: Türkiye should first be formally warned, and its situation closely monitored, before taking any irreversible decision regarding its status.

Steiner, taking the floor in the plenary debate, summarised the approach endorsed by his committee:

"The report demands of the new Turkish Government that it shall restore democracy to the full, and it calls upon the Council of Europe to follow developments in Türkiye with the greatest attention, so that appropriate later reports can be drawn up by the Parliamentary Assembly and/or the Committee of Ministers. In the present situation, it is surely also significant that we should not do anything which might mean a final separation of Türkiye from Europe. Nor should we make it too easy for the military rulers concerning their commitments to the Council of



Europe, by releasing them prematurely from such commitments.”

The floor was then taken by Ib Christensen, a Liberal parliamentarian from Denmark, who represented the group most vocally opposed to the coup. He posed a stark challenge:

“What we have to consider here and now is the question of whether the Council of Europe can accept the membership of a country that at intervals subjects itself to dictatorship, neglects human rights, and, in so doing, violates the solemn objectives and principles laid down in Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe.”

Dutch Socialist parliamentarian Harry van den Bergh followed Christensen. While equally critical of the military junta, he also held the civilian political class accountable:

“I know of no example where a military takeover has brought positive benefits. In general, these military regimes do not create or bring back democratic institutions. In saying that, however, one must add, in condemning the generals, that – at least in my view – democracy was not functioning any more in Türkiye. I think that we also have to blame the main political parties in Türkiye which unfortunately, were unable to solve the serious problems facing the country. [...] We should take a few months to see what happens, but, if there is no improvement or no sign of a move towards an improvement, there can be no alternative to suspending Türkiye from the Council of Europe.”

The President of the Turkish delegation, Cevdet Akçalı, then asked for the floor. Akçalı was a close associate of Süleyman Demirel, Türkiye’s Prime Minister before the military coup. His experience in the Council of Europe dated back to 1971, and he would continue to serve in the Assembly until the early 2000s. Having actively participated in the Assembly’s debates following the 1971 military intervention, Akçalı had long since internalised the Council of Europe’s philosophy and discourse. Now, in the aftermath of a new military seizure of power, he faced one of the most consequential moments of his political career.



His goal was clear: to prevent the exclusion of Türkiye from the Council of Europe.

"We have great confidence in the decisions and intentions of the Turkish Armed Forces to restore a strong democratic order in the shortest possible time," he declared. "We have evidence to support our belief. Our presence here to participate in the current session of the Assembly is a clear justification of our confidence. This visit, like others that we shall be making in the future, stems from our willingness to maintain a dialogue with the free and democratic society of Europe, a point also made in the proclamation of General Kenan Evren. The Turkish Army has always demonstrated until now its respect for democracy, a respect based on experience and tradition acquired throughout its history. The National Security Council is appealing for help in its struggle to re-create democratic conditions for all – the citizens, the administration, the workers and the constitutional bodies."

Yet doubts remained among several European parliamentarians. Swedish Socialist Carl Gunnar raised the sensitive issue of the limited composition of the Turkish delegation. He questioned the credibility and legitimacy of a delegation that no longer represented an active national parliament:

"Must we really accept the credentials of members of a parliament which in fact has been dissolved? Have we any means of knowing, in this particular case, whether our Turkish colleagues really can express themselves in complete freedom and with total frankness? Certainly, we do not know the whole story. In any case, four Representatives out of twelve! Where are the others? We ought to show some interest in that. Whose selection, is it? Who has sent us these four Representatives out of twelve? Who is to say that they are a democratic delegation in the honourable sense of the word?"

In response, Metin Toker, a prominent journalist and independent senator, rose to defend the integrity of the delegation:



"Our sceptical colleagues need have no doubt and no worries about the small number of us present in the Assembly. I am here representing myself, just like the other members of the delegation. Why did the new government send a smaller delegation? I have no idea, but certainly not because of any opinions expressed or votes cast during debates in the Council of Europe or even in the Turkish Parliament. But you can be sure that we are not people to take orders or instructions from the government."

Among the many voices heard during the debate, the intervention of German Christian Democrat parliamentarian Erich Mende stood out for both its depth and personal perspective. A seasoned member of the Parliamentary Assembly since 1958, Mende was no stranger to Türkiye. His familiarity with the country dated back to 1953, when he visited Türkiye as part of a German delegation. He had since contributed to the establishment of a Turkish-German Association and maintained close interest in Türkiye's democratic development.

Mende took a firm stance against those who compared the military coup in Türkiye to events in Latin America. "In my view", he declared, "the following principle should guide this Assembly in its deliberations: any comparison of the events in Türkiye with a military putsch in South America is an insult to the Turkish soldier and an insult to the Turkish people. For the genesis of the modern Turkish state was the struggle waged by the military against the enemies of the Ottoman Empire outside the country, and internally, against any step backwards into the past of that Empire. At its head stood the General Kemal Pasha, alias Atatürk, the Father of Türkiye. Thus, from the very moment when modern Türkiye emerged, it has been impossible to deny the role played by the Turkish Army."

He then offered a revealing anecdote from a recent visit to Ankara; recounting discussions held in April 1979 with a cross-party German delegation:

"I visited Türkiye in April of last year with three colleagues of the ruling Social Democrat Party in Bonn, three colleagues from the Christian Democratic Opposition and



one Liberal member. We spoke with Mr. Ecevit, who was then Prime Minister. We spoke with Mr. Demirel. We also spoke with military circles, including General Evren. The military implored us to insist that the two large parties [AP, CHP] should co-operate, so that a broad coalition under Messrs. Ecevit and Demirel could take place. Otherwise, they said, we, the military, will again have to intervene, and that we do not want. Mr. Kiep, the finance minister, who was also present in the interests of financial assistance, joined us in talks with the two political leaders, Messrs. Ecevit and Demirel. We pointed out to them that even Germany in 1966, in a much less dangerous situation, had, for the first time, formed a large-scale coalition of the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democrat Party. Still, we were preaching to deaf ears. The personal enmity between these two statesmen made such co-operation impossible."

Mende's speech added historical context and personal insight to the debate, highlighting not only the military's warnings prior to the coup, but also the missed political opportunities that might have averted it. His intervention served as a reminder that while democratic breakdowns may be condemned, they are often preceded by sustained political dysfunction—and, at times, ignored appeals for compromise.

The debate on the situation in Türkiye resumed the following day, 1 October, at 10:00 a.m., with Mr de Koster, President of the Assembly, presiding. The first to take the floor was British parliamentarian Robert Edwards, a member of the Socialist Group. Edwards had long been active in the international labour movement and had supported the development of trade unions in Türkiye. As a former member of the European Parliament, he had also served on the Joint Parliamentary Committee with Türkiye and was known for his solidarity with workers' causes.

In his speech, Edwards voiced strong criticism of the new military regime's approach to trade unions and workers' rights. Drawing a sharp contrast with recent developments in Eastern Europe, he declared:



"We applauded the great victory of the Polish workers when they won the right to strike. One of the first declarations of the military regime in Türkiye was to order the striking steel workers back to work, with the threat of imprisonment if they did not obey. Even the Polish Communist Government did not dare to do that. [...] The general [Kenan Evren] talked in his broadcast about traitors who sang the 'Internationale'. I have been singing the 'Internationale' at May Day meetings since I was 12 years old. It is the song of Democratic socialism. From tropical zones to frosty poles on 1 May, millions of workers sing the song of international solidarity. What kind of mentality has this General, supposedly in charge of Türkiye, that he does not understand the history of half of the human race?"

Greek parliamentarians, deeply marked by the trauma of their own recent dictatorship, repeatedly invoked the memory of the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. Demetre Frangos, from the conservative New Democracy Party, reflected on those years with emotion and conviction:

"I should like to mention a few memories of a Greek citizen, who for eight years lived under a dictatorship, hoping all the time, like the entire Greek people, for support from the free world and the Council of Europe, praying that the latter would exert pressure so that parliamentary democracy, freedom and respect for human rights might be restored in Greece. I shall never forget that the Greek people, in their entirety, listened every day to broadcasts in Greek by foreign radio stations: 9:40 p.m. the Deutsche Welle, 9 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. the BBC, and 2:30 p.m. Paris radio."

Lady Amalia Fleming, also from Greece and a prominent member of the Socialist Group, echoed these sentiments with even greater intensity. A committed human rights advocate and a symbol of democratic resistance during the Greek military junta, Fleming drew a direct parallel between the stance taken against the Greek Colonels and the present challenge posed by the Turkish military:



“The Greek democrats fought to persuade the Council of Europe to expel the Colonels from their midst. In so doing, they were demanding not the expulsion of the Greek people, but the protection of our people and our country. When the decision to expel the Colonels was taken, it was a victory for us, and we were able to continue our struggle for freedom with more hope, because we knew that we were no longer abandoned to our sad fate and that the democratic countries supported us. Of course, some of our ambassadors came into this chamber to defend the regime of the Colonels; but we considered that they were not the true friends of our people.”

The debate was turning into a clash of memory and principle, as parliamentarians who had lived through authoritarianism held up their own national experiences as moral touchstones for assessing Türkiye’s military regime. For them, the question was not only whether Türkiye could remain in the Council of Europe, but whether the Council of Europe itself would remain faithful to its foundational values.

One of the Turkish parliamentarians, Besim Üstünel of the CHP, also asked for the floor. A respected economist and a member of the Socialist Group, Üstünel served as Rapporteur of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the Parliamentary Assembly. In a sober and introspective speech, he addressed not only the collapse of parliamentary democracy in Türkiye but the political failures that had paved the way for the military intervention. With remarkable candour, he offered a *mea culpa* on behalf of the Turkish political class:

“I cannot deny that during the last few years, and especially during recent months, as members of the Turkish Parliament, whether individually, in parliamentary groups or as a whole, we have committed numerous grave errors and missed valuable opportunities for creating the necessary conditions and taking essential measures for the appropriate and smooth functioning of our democracy. Lack of tolerance paved the way to extreme polarisation in all sectors of life, and unbridled competition between the parties prevented the formation of a grand coalition in



parliament. Consequently, we gradually lost the confidence of our respective electorates, thus creating an atmosphere of popular deception. It was for this reason that news of the military intervention was received with some relief among the population of my country.”

Üstünel did not limit his criticism to Turkish political actors. He also turned his attention to Western Europe, questioning the responsiveness and solidarity of the Council of Europe’s member states:

“It will be remembered that Mr. Ecevit, as Prime Minister, came to Strasbourg and addressed this Assembly some fifteen months ago. He spoke of the acute difficulties facing Türkiye and the enormous predicaments and challenges with which Türkiye was faced as a developing country trying to solve its huge economic problems under a democratic regime. He appealed for the understanding and assistance of the European governments. Therefore, if Türkiye has drifted away from parliamentary democracy today, it is due largely to the indifference and neglect of the industrialised West, whose bureaucratic and democratic procedures were too slow to keep up with the requirements of large-scale and abrupt changes in economic structures and technological variables during the last decade.”

Üstünel’s speech stood out not only for its honesty but for the way it challenged both national and European complacency. It served as a reminder that the crisis of Turkish democracy was as much about structural failure and missed opportunities as it was about military ambition.

The final speaker of the debate was Turan Güneş, one of the emblematic figures of Turkish social democracy. A seasoned politician and former foreign minister, Güneş addressed the Assembly with a mix of realism and urgency. Echoing Besim Üstünel, he made it clear that the Turkish delegation in Strasbourg had not been specially selected by the new authorities: they were not, he stressed, “the chosen ones”. He openly acknowledged the political collapse that had enabled the military coup of 12 September, stating:



"Türkiye and the Turkish people must be helped because – and I tell you this in all candour – at present there is no politician with sufficient prestige to command respect and lead the Turkish people. I must confess, before the European family, that such are the depths to which our reputation in Türkiye has fallen. That possibility does not exist for us in Türkiye. Were this not the case, how could one explain the fact that Mr. Ecevit or Mr. Demirel, when politely asked by a representative sent by the generals to place themselves at the service of the army, offered no resistance? No one resisted because no one would have been followed by the working class, the trade unions or the peasants. No one in Türkiye was in a position to resist when we were asked to leave the parliament and go and live elsewhere in the country."

The debate concluded with the adoption, by a show of hands, of a recommendation that reflected both political concern and solidarity. The Assembly called on Türkiye to uphold its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, to release all detained deputies who had not violated laws in force prior to 12 September 1980, and to permit the creation of trade unions, democratic associations, and political parties. It also urged a swift return to a democratic constitutional order. The Assembly further recommended that the Committee of Ministers consider suspending Türkiye's membership should these core democratic and legal standards not be respected. In parallel, a separate concern was raised over the decision by the Federal Republic of Germany and France to impose compulsory visas on Turkish nationals as of 5 October 1980—a move the Assembly deemed discriminatory and incompatible with the spirit of European unity. The recommendation urged those governments to repeal the visa requirement without delay and called on other Council of Europe member states, especially those within the



Turan Güneş,
Member of the
Parliamentary
Assembly,
1954–1956, 1957–
1958, 1975–1976,
1977–1981



European Communities, to refrain from adopting similar measures that could undermine Türkiye's pro-European orientation and hamper the integration of Turkish migrants.

The situation in Türkiye once again topped the agenda of the Assembly during its next plenary session held from 26 to 30 January 1981. Ludwig Steiner remained the rapporteur on Türkiye, and his second report on the country was scheduled for debate on 28 and 29 January. At the time, Sweden held the rotating Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Just before the debate on Türkiye began on 28 January, the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ola Ullsten, addressed the plenary. The Swedish government had previously proposed, on 19 December 1980, that the Committee of Ministers examine the situation in Türkiye at each of its meetings—an initiative that failed to gain unanimous support among member states.

Sweden's position was shaped in part by domestic concerns: the country had received a significant number of immigrants of Assyrian origin from Türkiye and had already introduced compulsory visas for Turkish citizens as early as 1977—the first Council of Europe member state to do so. In his speech, Ullsten underscored the organisation's moral responsibility, declaring, "The credibility of the Council of Europe stands and falls with its capability of defending the ideals on which it is founded. This means, among other things, that when we deal with the question of Türkiye, we must remember the basic principle on which this organisation is founded—that the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms and parliamentary democracy should be respected." Recalling recent history, Ullsten noted that the Scandinavian countries had appealed to the European Court of Human Rights against the Greek military junta. While he acknowledged that the situation in Türkiye was not identical, he nonetheless affirmed that, if necessary, an application could be brought against Türkiye before the European Commission of Human Rights.

The Turkish delegation attended the plenary session in Strasbourg with its full complement of twelve members. However, two permanent members—Temel Karamollaoğlu



of the National Salvation Party (MSP) and Ağâh Oktay Güner of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)—were unable to participate due to their imprisonment following the 12 September military coup. They were replaced by Abdullah Köseoğlu from the Republican People's Party and Şaban Karataş from the Justice Party.

At the time, Türkiye's Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe was Ambassador Semih Günver, who in a memoir published in 1988 recalled a telling episode that occurred just before the delegation's departure for the January 1981 part-session:

"One day before the delegation left for Strasbourg, the Secretary-General of the National Security Council, Full General Haydar Saltık, invited the members of the Parliamentary Assembly delegation to his office. Only six of them attended: Halit Evliya, Turan Güneş, Muammer Aksoy, Metin Toker, Şaban Karataş, and Oral Karaosmanoğlu. General Saltık, speaking with apparent courtesy, informed them that this would be their final mission to Strasbourg and that their political careers had come to an end. Then, turning to Metin Toker, he added, 'Of course you are not included in what I have just said.' Turan Güneş was offended, while the others were left disheartened."

The Austrian rapporteur Ludwig Steiner and the Spanish member of the Political Affairs Committee, Luis Yáñez-Barnuevo, had visited Ankara and Istanbul between 5 and 9 January 1981 as part of their mission on behalf of the Assembly. They had requested to meet the two imprisoned Turkish parliamentarians, Temel Karamollaoğlu and Ağâh Oktay Güner, but the military authorities denied permission. With the exception of the National Security Council and the two detainees, the delegation was able to meet all those they had requested, including Prime Minister Bülend Ulusu, a former commander of the Turkish Navy; Foreign Minister İlder Türkmen; the former leaders of the dissolved political parties; and the last Speakers of the Grand National Assembly and the Senate. Their discussions focused on the timetable for a return to democracy, the constitutional situation, and the status of politicians and local authorities in the aftermath of the 12 September military coup.



Allegations of human rights violations, including torture and mistreatment, gave Steiner deeper cause for concern than during his previous assessments. In response, he drafted a resolution calling for a warning to be issued to Türkiye, while recommending continued close monitoring of domestic developments before considering the country's possible exclusion from the Council of Europe. This draft resolution was adopted by an overwhelming majority on 29 January 1981. Turkish parliamentarians abstained.

When the Assembly reconvened in May 1981 to continue examining the situation in Türkiye, the Turkish delegation was no longer present. Their credentials had lapsed, and with no functioning Parliament in Ankara, there was no legal basis to re-approve the delegation. This absence, while problematic for Turkish diplomacy, was not unwelcome to the ruling military junta. General Evren and his staff had grown increasingly intolerant of the Assembly's harsh criticisms. Turkish diplomats, aware of the serious consequences that exclusion from the Council of Europe could entail, tried to persuade the generals to reconsider—but to no avail.

On 13 May 1981, an unexpected and sombre moment unfolded during the Assembly's plenary discussions on the situation in Türkiye. That afternoon, as the sitting resumed at 3 p.m., the military regime once again came under heavy criticism from numerous parliamentarians. While the Greek representative Coutsocheras was concluding his remarks, the President of the Assembly, José María de Areilza, received an urgent written communication. Interrupting the debate, he announced solemnly:

"I have a very serious announcement to make. AFP has just reported that shots have been fired in Rome at Pope John Paul II during his general audience. The Pope is said to have been wounded and evacuated from the Piazza San Pietro, where the crowd is in prayer. German radio has confirmed the news, saying that the Holy Father's condition is serious and that Radio Vatican asks the faithful to pray for him. If the Assembly agrees, I want to send a



telegram to the Vatican immediately. I will read it out in a few moments.”

The debate was momentarily suspended. News of the assassination attempt reverberated throughout Strasbourg, especially after it emerged that the attacker was a Turkish national. This revelation dealt a profound blow to Turkish diplomats, who had been working tirelessly to shield their country from suspension or exclusion from the Council of Europe.

The following day, on 14 May, the Assembly proceeded to vote on two resolutions regarding Türkiye. The first addressed the broader political developments in the country; the second concerned the credentials of the Turkish parliamentary delegation. After a long and contentious debate, the Assembly refrained from excluding Türkiye from the Council of Europe but resolved to keep the situation under close scrutiny. However, it did challenge the validity of the former Turkish delegation’s credentials. This marked the second time since Türkiye’s accession to the Council of Europe in 1949 that its parliamentarians were barred from participating in Assembly proceedings. No Turkish representatives returned to the Assembly until democratic elections took place, and a new Grand National Assembly of Türkiye was convened. Following the military coup of 12 September 1980, parliamentary elections, considered relatively free, were eventually held in November 1983. The seats allocated to Türkiye in the Assembly remained vacant until January 1984.

Following the adoption of the resolutions on 14 May 1981, the situation in Türkiye remained a standing item on the Assembly’s agenda. The Assembly continued to monitor developments through successive missions and additional resolutions. The most significant of these visits took place on 8 January 1982. Despite sustained criticism from European institutions, Full General Kenan Evren—the Chief of the General Staff and the principal architect of the 12 September 1980 military coup—agreed, for the first time, to receive a delegation from the Assembly. The meeting was held at Çankaya Palace, the official residence of the President of Türkiye.



According to former ambassador Semih Günver, General Evren met with four members of the delegation for approximately 45 minutes. During this rare encounter, he sought to justify the military regime's position by portraying Türkiye as under serious threat from radical left-wing elements infiltrating legitimate political parties. He urged the Assembly to adopt a more patient and tolerant approach towards what he described as a necessary transitional period. While reaffirming Türkiye's commitment to the international conventions it had ratified, General Evren presented continued engagement with the Council of Europe as proof of Türkiye's willingness to remain aligned with Europe. In a striking analogy, he compared the contemporary global situation to the prelude to the Second World War, warning that the spread of pacifist sentiments among younger generations—combined with rising global armament—could lead to renewed geopolitical instability. Implicitly appealing to Western strategic concerns, General Evren positioned Türkiye not only as a country under internal strain but also as a frontline ally in the broader East–West confrontation.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe had also been closely monitoring the situation in Türkiye since the military coup of 12 September 1980, with the issue regularly discussed *in camera* (closed-door) sessions. One of the more significant moments occurred between 21 and 25 September 1981, marking the first anniversary of the coup. That week, the Ambassadors—representing the Foreign Ministers of member states—gathered in Strasbourg to assess developments in Türkiye. The issue remained firmly on the agenda, reflecting persistent concerns over the democratic deficit and the human rights situation under military rule.

Türkiye's Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe, Ambassador Semih Günver, had just returned from a three-month posting in Türkiye. During the Strasbourg meeting, he delivered a speech that echoed many of the themes expressed by General Evren in his address on the same date in Ankara. Günver focused on



what the regime considered its main achievements: improved security conditions following anti-terror operations, the dismantling of illegal organisations, increased exports, a reduction in inflation, and the prospect of creating a Consultative Assembly as part of the transitional process.

He also addressed several concerns raised in European circles. He affirmed that foreign legal observers had been allowed to attend the trial of Necmettin Erbakan, former leader of the dissolved National Salvation Party, and described their assessments as “positive”. Similarly, he acknowledged the international attention paid to the case against the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye (DİSK), though without delving into the substance of the trial or its broader implications for labour rights.

Throughout his speech, Günver emphasised Türkiye’s continued commitment to its obligations as a member of the Council of Europe. At the same time, he conveyed the military government’s resistance to what it viewed as external pressure for a rapid return to democratic rule. Citing the need for national stability and the painful memory of pre-coup violence, Günver argued that Türkiye’s political recovery would require time and patience. “It is pointless to hustle the Turkish leaders for an immediate return to democracy”, he declared, suggesting that premature elections could risk a relapse into chaos and terrorism.

He concluded by invoking Atatürk’s maxim, “Peace at home, peace in the world” and reaffirmed Türkiye’s European vocation: “Türkiye will in no way neglect its European mission; it is in Europe, and it will stay there, preferably with the Council of Europe.” The statement reflected both a desire to remain anchored within European institutions and an implicit warning against isolating Türkiye during a period it considered both delicate and transitional.

Due to the increasingly repressive measures of the military regime, Türkiye faced a genuine risk of exclusion from the Council of Europe and the broader European family. In the face of sustained criticism, the generals even considered a complete withdrawal from the organisation. Yet another



serious development soon emerged in Strasbourg. On 1 July 1982, invoking the European Convention on Human Rights, five member states—France, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands—lodged an inter-state application against Türkiye before the European Commission of Human Rights. The application focused on the period from 12 September 1980 to 1 July 1982 and alleged an official practice of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in Türkiye. Particular attention was given to the DİSK case, which had provoked widespread concern across European trade union and political circles. This move was not without precedent: in 1967, some of these same Scandinavian countries had filed a similar inter-state case against the Greek military junta, helping establish Strasbourg's role in defending democratic norms within the Council of Europe.

Although the case against Türkiye initially gained strong political and legal momentum, it gradually began to lose traction after the country held general elections in November 1983 and formally returned to a parliamentary regime. By late 1985, the governments of the applicant states—eager to encourage Türkiye's slow process of political normalisation—decided to abandon the case. On 7 December 1985, they formally withdrew the application, citing a “friendly settlement” based on Türkiye's commitment to democratisation. The decision, however, was not without controversy. Critics, particularly among the European left, regretted the premature closure of a case that might have led to a full legal judgment and broader scrutiny of human rights abuses committed under military rule.

Meanwhile, Europe's political landscape was being transformed by democratic transitions in the south. Greece, Spain, and Portugal were consolidating their democratic regimes and joining the EEC, thereby reshaping the continent's political architecture. In this context, Türkiye's scheduled Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers—originally set for May 1981—was postponed at Ankara's own request. However, the issue did not disappear. In the following years, Türkiye faced persistent



opposition to assuming the rotating chairmanship, as numerous European governments continued to question its democratic credentials. A compromise was eventually reached with Liechtenstein, allowing Türkiye to assume the Chairmanship for the first time since 1972, holding the position from 20 November 1986 to 7 May 1987.

The Turkish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers symbolised Türkiye's return to the Council of Europe. In 1987, Türkiye paved the way for individual applications from its citizens to the European Court of Human Rights. In the same year, Ali Bozer, the State Secretary for Community Affairs—a former judge at the European Court of Human Rights—submitted Türkiye's application for full membership to the European Economic Community. These two initiatives were no coincidence. They reflected a co-ordinated effort by the government of Prime Minister Turgut Özal, the founding leader of the Motherland Party (ANAP). Although politically conservative, Özal was staunchly pro-Western, pro-European, and reformist. His government sought to re-anchor Türkiye within European institutions and to modernise the country's political, legal, and economic structures. Embracing economic liberalism, he pursued wide-ranging reforms aimed at integrating Türkiye more deeply into the global market economy.



Turgut Özal,
Prime Minister of
Türkiye, addressing
the Parliamentary
Assembly,
Strasbourg,
27 September 1989



Özal addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 27 September 1989, shortly before a plenary debate. “Human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal,” he declared. “They are indivisible, interdependent and inalienable. Humankind has made a big qualitative jump in this area. Human rights questions today transcend national boundaries. They can no longer be considered as matters that fall solely within the domestic jurisdiction of countries, and they must be dealt with universally. When I visit the European Court of Human Rights this afternoon, I shall convey to it the decision of my government to recognise the competence of that Court.”

These initiatives represented a significant evolution in Turkish political life, yet they were not sufficient to bring the country fully into line with the democratic standards expected in Western Europe. Enduring domestic challenges continued to hinder Türkiye’s ability to catch the “European train”. Meanwhile, the collapse of Soviet regimes in Central and Eastern Europe gave rise to an institutional revival within the Council of Europe. From 1990 onwards, former Eastern bloc countries began joining the organisation, eager to embrace a liberal democratic model grounded in human rights, the rule of law, and pluralistic institutions, as promoted by the Council of Europe.

Just months earlier, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had heralded this historic transformation in Strasbourg. Addressing the Parliamentary Assembly on 6 July 1989, Gorbachev introduced his vision of a “common European home”—a concept that directly challenged the logic of Cold War confrontation. “The philosophy of the concept of a common European home”, he told the Assembly, “rules out the probability of an armed clash and the very possibility of the use or threat of force, above all military force, by an alliance against another alliance, inside alliances or wherever it may be. It suggests a doctrine of restraint to replace the doctrine of deterrence. This is not just a play on notions, but a logic of European development imposed by life itself.”



Gorbachev's remarks resonated with the Council of Europe's evolving purpose. His "new country", Russia, would later join this common home in 1996. In the early 1990s, the Council of Europe began developing new political and legal mechanisms to assess democratisation and human rights within its expanding membership. These included the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The European Court of Human Rights—once handling only a handful of cases—also evolved into a full-time judicial body, significantly expanding its role from the late 1990s onwards.

The question of establishing a monitoring mechanism—now considered a cornerstone of European democratic oversight—was first raised within the Parliamentary Assembly in 1993. The mechanism was formally institutionalised in 1997 with the creation of the Monitoring Committee, which has since become one of the Assembly's most influential bodies. Among the long-standing member states of the Council of Europe, Türkiye was the only one to be placed under this monitoring procedure, following a decision adopted by the Assembly in 1996.

This was not a symbolic gesture. In principle, no European country could credibly claim to meet the Copenhagen political criteria—required for European Union accession—while simultaneously being subjected to the Parliamentary Assembly's monitoring process. The Copenhagen criteria were rooted in the core judicial and political standards developed by the Council of Europe since its founding in 1949. These standards were explicitly enshrined in Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, which states: "Every member of the Council of Europe must accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms and collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council [of Europe]."



It appeared paradoxical that Türkiye—a country that had actively contributed to shaping the Council of Europe’s democratic norms and human rights standards—was now struggling to meet those very criteria. However, a turning point emerged at the end of the 1990s. At the European Council summit held in Helsinki in December 1999, the European Union formally recognised Türkiye as a candidate for full membership. This decision reinvigorated Türkiye’s reform process and encouraged Ankara to re-engage with the Council of Europe. A series of key legislative reforms followed, including the abolition of the death penalty and a landmark amendment to Article 90 of the Constitution. On 7 May 2004, the following sentence was added: “In the case of a conflict between international agreements, duly put into effect, concerning fundamental rights and freedoms and the laws due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.” This amendment effectively gave precedence to the European Convention on Human Rights over domestic legislation, marking a major constitutional step towards aligning Turkish law with European standards.

The initial phase of this reform process was led by the coalition government of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and the Motherland Party (ANAP). It later gained renewed vigour under the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), led by then Prime Minister (and current President) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The Council of Europe welcomed these developments, seeing them as signs of long-awaited democratic consolidation. While some EU politicians remained sceptical, the European Union’s institutions acknowledged and valued the Council of Europe’s positive assessments of Türkiye’s trajectory. As the only pan-European organisation with established monitoring mechanisms for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe became a key reference point. Türkiye’s EU progress reports—produced by the European Commission and the European Parliament—relied heavily on the Council of Europe’s monitoring assessments and on the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.



Following the general election in November 2002, a new Turkish delegation was appointed to Parliamentary Assembly. Composed predominantly of members of the newly elected AK Party, the delegation was led by Murat Mercan, a founding party member who would later serve as Türkiye's ambassador to Washington. The new delegation took its seats in Strasbourg in January 2003, marking the beginning of a more engaged and reform-oriented phase in Türkiye's relationship with the Council of Europe.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Prime Minister of Türkiye, addressing the Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, 28 June 2006

More significant, however, was the visit of then Prime Minister Abdullah Gül to Strasbourg during the January 2003 plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly. Gül, who served as prime minister from November 2002 to March 2003, was not an unfamiliar figure in Strasbourg—he had been a member of the Parliamentary Assembly from 1992 to 2001 and was also a co-founder of the AK Party.

Addressing the plenary on 27 January 2003, Gül reflected:



"I was privileged to be a member of this body. I consider the Council of Europe to be a school for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It contributed immensely to my political philosophy. In the 1990s, following the removal of dividing lines in Europe, I was part of fact-finding missions in candidate countries of the Council of Europe. We lived through the enlargement of the Council [of Europe]. I am happy to see those countries as fully-fledged members represented here today."

Some of the countries referenced in his speech would go on to join the EU the following year.

Following his brief premiership, Gül served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2003 to 2007, during a critical phase in Türkiye's EU accession process, and later as President of the Republic from 2007 to 2014.

Since 2003, Turkish heads of state have made more official visits to Strasbourg than during the previous six decades of the Council of Europe's history. Abdullah Gül returned to the Parliamentary Assembly plenary in 2007 and again in 2011, during Türkiye's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as prime minister, paid official visits in 2004, 2006 and 2011.

Thanks to the reforms carried out in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Court of Human Rights, the CPT, and the Commissioner for Human Rights, Türkiye successfully completed the monitoring process in 2004. The Parliamentary Assembly concluded that Türkiye had "clearly demonstrated its commitment and ability to fulfil its statutory obligations as a Council of Europe member state" and decided to end the monitoring procedure launched in 1996. Despite internal political differences, members of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly worked together to achieve this outcome. The "normalisation" of relations with the Assembly also had a substantial impact on the European Union's decision to open accession negotiations with Türkiye in 2005.

Following the end of the monitoring process, Turkish parliamentarians assumed more prominent roles within the Parliamentary Assembly. Abdülkadir Ateş (CHP) became Chair of the Political Affairs Committee, one of



the Assembly's most influential bodies. Another CHP parliamentarian, Gülsüm Bilgehan, chaired the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Meanwhile, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, a founding member of the AK Party, chaired the Committee on Migration and Population and served as Vice-Chairman of the European Democrat Group. In January 2010, he was elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly—the first Turkish parliamentarian to hold that office—and served until January 2012. His election marked a milestone in Türkiye's six-decade relationship with the Council of Europe.

Çavuşoğlu's experience in Strasbourg significantly elevated his domestic profile and laid the foundation for a prominent diplomatic career. He later served as Minister for European Union Affairs (2013–2014), before assuming the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs, a post he held from 2014 to 2023. His time at the Parliamentary Assembly endowed him with substantial international experience, deep familiarity with European institutions, and a reputation for consensus-building—qualities that came to define his long tenure in Turkish foreign policy.



Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (left), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye and President of the Parliamentary Assembly (2010–2012), with Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2009–2019), Strasbourg, 12 October 2016.

Conclusion

Türkiye's relationship with the Council of Europe tells a story of shared ideals, enduring commitment, and a deep belief in the transformative power of democratic values. As one of the Organisation's founding members in 1949, Türkiye helped lay the groundwork for a post-war Europe rooted in human dignity, pluralism, and the rule of law. Yet this pioneering role has too often faded from view — both across Europe and, at times, within Türkiye itself. The memory of that early, active contribution to shaping a peaceful and democratic continent deserves renewed recognition, particularly as Europe faces an uncertain future.

Over the decades, this relationship has withstood profound tests. Periods of domestic upheaval — most notably, a series of military interventions — disrupted Türkiye's democratic trajectory and raised concerns among its European partners. But these moments of crisis were also followed by resilience, renewal, and reform. Time and again, Turkish society and its institutions have found ways to re-engage with the very ideals that inspired its original engagement. Throughout this journey, the Council of Europe has served as both a mirror and a guide — reflecting shortcomings while offering encouragement, expertise, and solidarity in support of democratic transformation.

The Council of Europe's mechanisms — including the European Court of Human Rights, the Venice Commission, the CPT, and the Parliamentary Assembly — have played a formative role in this process. A particularly emblematic milestone was the 2004 constitutional amendment to Article 90, which reinforced the authority of international treaties within Türkiye's domestic legal system. By establishing the primacy of such treaties in cases of conflict with domestic legislation — especially regarding fundamental rights and freedoms — and exempting them from constitutional review, the amendment underscored Türkiye's alignment with international legal standards and its commitment to a rules-based order.



These reforms, and the broader engagement they signified, marked a turning point in Türkiye's integration into the European democratic landscape. Speaking before the Assembly in Strasbourg on 6 October 2004, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan captured the moment: "We are proud to be one of the founding members which, in 1949, laid the foundation of this common home of European nations that subscribe to the ideals of pluralistic democracy, the supremacy of the rule of law, and which uphold fundamental human rights and freedoms."

Today, that founding spirit remains deeply relevant. Türkiye's continued presence in the Council of Europe is more than symbolic — it is a core element of its engagement with European institutions and of its role within a shared European political space. As the continent faces new and complex challenges, the Council of Europe continues to provide a vital forum for dialogue, accountability, and collective purpose. Within this framework, Türkiye — like many other member states — navigates its responsibilities amid shifting regional and global dynamics. Its enduring commitment to the values first articulated in 1949, and its sustained contributions over the decades, remain a foundation for deeper co-operation and mutual understanding.

By remembering this legacy and reaffirming its founding place in the Council of Europe, Türkiye is well placed to help shape the future — not only as a member state, but as a co-author of the democratic vision that continues to bind the continent together.

Bibliography

Consultative Assembly Official Reports, 1949-1974,
Council of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly Official Reports, 1974-2012,
Council of Europe

Minutes and Conclusions of the Meetings of the Ministers'
Deputies, 1949-2000

Bruno Haller, "Une Assemblée au service de l'Europe.
L'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe, 1949-
1989", Strasbourg, Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 2006

"Conseil de l'Europe, les voix de l'Europe, 1949-1996.
Sélection de discours prononcés devant l'Assemblée
parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe", Strasbourg,
Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 1997

Edgar Morin, "Penser l'Europe", Paris, Gallimard, Folio
actuel, 1990

Florence Benoit-Rohmer & Heinrich Klebes, "Council of
Europe law – Towards a pan-European legal area", Council
of Europe Publishing, 2005

Georges Corm, "L'Europe et le Mythe de l'Occident", La
Découverte, 2009

Jacques Delors, "Mémoires", Plon, 2004 Dominique
Colas,

Jean Petaux, "L'Europe de la démocratie et des droits de
l'homme", Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 2009

"L'Europe post communiste", Presses Universitaires de
France PUF, 2002

Semih Günver, "Kızgın Dam Üzerinde Diplomasi", Milliyet
Yayınları, 1989

Türkiye played a pivotal role in shaping the early ideas, texts, and legal instruments that laid the groundwork for a united Europe. Through extensive research in the archives of the Council of Europe, journalist Kayhan Karaca—an expert in European politics and institutions—unearthed long-forgotten speeches, correspondences, documents, and records contributed by Turkish and European parliamentarians, diplomats, and jurists. These discoveries shed new light on Türkiye’s influence in the construction of modern Europe, underscore the crucial role of Turkish founding figures in the European project, and offer a fresh perspective on Turkish–European relations. The book also examines how political turmoil—including military interventions—at times hindered Türkiye from realising its full potential within the European framework. It reveals a rich and previously overlooked history of dialogue, collaboration, and shared vision that helped shape the Europe we know today.

NOT FOR SALE



THE SOVEREIGNTY UNCONDITIONALLY BELONGS TO THE NATION