The changes in the political situation in Europe have resulted in the need to reassess the role and structures of European and Atlantic co-operation. The peaceful revolution in Central and Eastern Europe and the collapse of an oppressive socio-political system – symbolized by the fall of the Berlin wall – opened for all European citizens the perspective for a united Europe. For more than forty years Europeans in Central and Eastern Europe had been excluded from the process of European construction and integration, based on individual liberty, pluralist democratic institutions and the rule of law because they had the misfortune to be liberated by the wrong tanks. The ongoing democratic reforms and the expressed wish to join the Western European institutional model of pluralist democracy and market economy made COMECON and the Warsaw Pact obsolete as co-operation structures.

These political changes had also direct implications on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the most important structure for East-West political dialogue and multilateral co-operation during the last sixteen years. Since the signature of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, the CSCE has been an ongoing process of diplomatic conferences aiming at the implementation of the texts signed at Helsinki and those agreed on at subsequent follow-up meetings (Belgrade, Madrid and Vienna). The events in Eastern and Central Europe in the second half of 1989 and the new climate in East-West relations had an immediate impact on the CSCE. Since 1975, UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) have been the only international organisations referred to in the CSCE texts as organisations which may contribute to the practical implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. At the CSCE’s Bonn Economic Conference in April 1990, OECD, for the first time, was given a specific role in implementing the Forum’s conclusions and at the CSCE’s Copenhagen Conference on the Human Dimension in 1990, the important expertise of the Council of Europe in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms was recognized. It was agreed to consider further ways and means to enable the Council of Europe to make a contribution to the human dimension of the CSCE. Finally, the November 1990 Paris Summit and its Charter for a new Europe brought a radical change in the CSCE structures. It was the start of an institutionalisation of the CSCE; the transformation of the CSCE from a forum of East-West confrontation and hard-negotiated ambiguous compromises to – possibly – an organ of authentic co-operation.

A new chapter has been opened in the process of European construction and integration. However, the euphoria over this new dimension of European unity has been overtaken by the reality of political and practical difficulties to overcome the existing gaps between the old and new partners in this process of European construction. Central and Eastern European countries are still characterised by frightening economic problems, an uncertain transition toward pluralist democracy, an increasing risk of social disintegration, with a related rise in nationalism and a return to old ethnic tensions. There is, therefore, an urgent need for intensive levels of co-operation to support the development of healthy economic structures based on market economy, for the strengthening of democratic institutions and for taking account of the region’s wish to be included in some sort of security framework linking it to the western partners.

That the success of the ongoing changes fully depends on the possibility for these countries to become part of the European process of construction and integration was clearly expressed by President Havel during his visit to the NATO headquarters in March 1991: “Security and co-operation in the Europe of tomorrow can best be achieved by a framework of interlocking institutions in which the interests of all European states can be accommodated. The
Czech and Slovak Federal Republic sees the true elements of the European architecture in the CSCE, the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Alliance, the European Communities and the Western European Union.

After these preliminary remarks, the following description of the existing - or at present developing structures of co-operation and integration will take into account the potential role that they can play in the further development of all European co-operation.

CSCE
The preamble of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe makes reference to a new era of democracy, peace and unity and underlines that the triumph of pluralist democracy, human rights and the rule of law must still be consolidated. The significant fact was that the 34 heads of State and government agreed to transform the CSCE 'process' into an 'institution'. A system of regular meetings was decided upon: summits in connection with follow-up meetings every second year, a Foreign Ministers' meeting at least once a year prepared by a Committee of Senior officials, which can decide itself on its number of meetings. Furthermore, three CSCE institutions, with very limited staffs (to consist of national officials on two-year secondment), were created:

- a Secretariat in Prague,
- a Centre for Prevention of Conflicts in Vienna, and
- an Office for Free Elections in Warsaw.

During 1991 five CSCE expert meetings are scheduled:

- Meeting on Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts in Valletta, (January, February);
- Symposium on Cultural Heritage in Cracow (May/June);
- Meeting of Experts on National Minorities in Geneva (July);
- Third meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension in Moscow (September);
- Seminar of Experts on Democratic Institutions in Oslo (November).

With regard to the parliamentary dimension of the CSCE, the Charter of Paris recognised the important role parliamentarians can play in the CSCE process and urged that contacts be pursued at parliamentary level to discuss the field of activities, working methods and rules of procedure of such a CSCE parliamentary structure, drawing on existing experience and work already undertaken in this field. On the invitation of the Spanish Parliament, parliamentarians from all the CSCE countries met from 2 to 4 April 1991 in Madrid and decided to recommend the creation of a CSCE parliamentary assembly with a limited secretariat staff. This new parliamentary body should meet once a year, each time in a different capital of one of the CSCE countries. It is suggested to hold a first session in Budapest in July 1992. It is up to the forthcoming Council of Foreign Ministers in Berlin on 19-20 June 1991 to consider this recommendation.

Council of Europe
The oldest of the political European post-war organisations has grown from 10 founder countries in 1949 to at present 25 members. Any European state can become a member of the Council of Europe provided it is based on pluralist democratic institutions, accepts the principle of the rule of law and guarantees everyone under its jurisdiction the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms as laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights, an international treaty of unprecedented scope which entered into force in 1953 and which has established a binding enforcement machinery (the European Commission and the European Court of Human Rights) to which States and individuals may refer alleged violations of the Convention. Besides its main aims to protect and strengthen pluralist democracy and human rights, as well as to promote the emergence of a genuine European cultural identity, the Council of Europe covers all major issues facing European society with the exception of defence. Its inter-governmental work programme includes the following fields of activity: human rights, media, legal harmonisation, social and economic questions, health, education, culture, heritage