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OFFICIAL REPORT

Tenth sitting

Tuesday 23 April 1996 at 10 am

In this report:

1. Speeches in English are reported in full.
2. Speeches in other languages are summarised.
3. Speeches in German and Italian are reproduced in full in a separate document.

Corrections should be handed in at Room 1053 not later than 24 hours after the report has been circulated.

The contents page for this sitting is given at the end of the verbatim report.

Mr Gricius, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the Chair at 10 am.

1. Opening of the sitting

THE PRESIDENT.- The sitting is open.

2. Adoption of the minutes

THE PRESIDENT.- The minutes of proceedings of the previous sitting have been distributed.

If there are no objections I will take the minutes as agreed to.

I should like to remind members how very important it is for the smooth running of our debates that our interpreters be given beforehand the texts of any speeches which are to be read in the Chamber.

I should also emphasise that interpreters do listen to the speakers, and can obviously cope with last-minute changes to a text.

We all stand to gain from adhering to this practice.

3. Request for urgent procedure

THE PRESIDENT.- The Assembly needs first to consider a request under the urgent procedure provided for in Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure.

The request for urgent procedure was submitted in due form and concerns the threat to the peace process in the middle east.

At its meeting yesterday afternoon the Bureau approved this request, and therefore recommends to the Assembly that the matter be placed on the agenda for this part-session. If the Assembly agrees with the Bureau's proposal, we will then consider the timing of the debate.

First, does the Assembly agree to the recommendation of the Bureau that this debate should be placed on the order paper for this part-session? I see that it does.

The Bureau's recommendation is accepted, and the request for urgent procedure is therefore approved.

We now have to consider when the debate on the threat to the peace process in the middle east should be held.

The proposal of the Bureau is that the debate should be held on Friday, 26 April, as the second order of the day. This is the only practical suggestion.

Is that agreed to?

It is so decided. This will involve the sitting being continued until 2 pm or perhaps 2.30 pm.

Following the usual practice of the Assembly which is to refer a question to only one committee for report - Rule 15 - I propose that the question of the threat to the peace process in the middle east be referred to the Political Affairs Committee for report.

Does the Assembly agree to this reference?

The reference is agreed to.

In order to allow sufficient time for the distribution of the report of the committee, I propose that the time limit for the tabling of amendments be fixed at 12 noon on Thursday, 25 April.

Is that agreed?

Mr RATHBONE (*United Kingdom*).- On a point of order, Mr President. Can you give any indication about when the report of the Political Affairs Committee will be available, because that has some bearing on whether one has the opportunity to put down amendments?

THE PRESIDENT.- It will be available as soon as possible. If Mr Bársony were present he could give us further information, but I hope that it will be available tomorrow.

4. Science and technology

THE PRESIDENT.- The second item of business this morning is the debate on the report on parliaments and the assessments of scientific and technological choices, presented by Mr Birraux on behalf of the Committee on Science and Technology, Doc. 7482.

The list of speakers closed at 6.00 pm yesterday. Ten names are on the list, and no amendments have been tabled.

I call Mr Birraux to present his report. He has 10 minutes.

Mr BIRRAUX (*France*) (*Rapporteur of the Committee on Science and Technology*) said that for a long time scientific progress had progressed quickly and dramatically. This had improved living standards and changed the lives of ordinary citizens. At the same time these citizens had held some suspicions of science and scientists. Some had lost their jobs owing to technological development and it was acknowledged that on a number of occasions the environment and public health had suffered from unwise use of new technology.

In such circumstances, the public turned to politicians for guidance and assistance. Politicians voted for research budgets and made important decisions on the implementation of new technology. However, many did not have a scientific background. They acted as the interface between the citizen and the scientific world.

Elected parliamentarians were an important bridge between science and the ordinary citizen. Technological assessment had taken different shapes in different countries. The French model in particular was of interest, not just because it was French but because it was based on the parliamentary process. Technological assessment was in its infancy. In Europe it existed in only five or six countries and it needed to be developed in order to exercise democratic control over the realm of science and technology. It permitted public debate and the provision of information to citizens, a process which this Assembly needed to encourage.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Mr Birraux. I call first in the debate Mr Caccia, who has seven minutes to speak.

Mr CACCIA (*Switzerland*) said that technological assessment had been introduced on an experimental basis in Switzerland in 1992. There was no need to dwell on the importance of technological assessment. But it was important to note the need for caution and to guard against illusions. Technological developments were unpredictable. For example, at the time of the discovery of the transistor in 1948, it would not have been possible to predict the ensuing developments in the field of semiconductors, and the consequences of recent developments in genetic engineering were still uncertain. Although it was useful to bear the risks of technological developments in mind, technological assessment tended to concentrate too much on the risks. Whilst these were important it was also essential to stress the positive aspects. A global effort was required to prevent the misuse of technology and to make information available. It was not only at the national level that mastery over developments such as semiconductors and genetic engineering could be achieved.

It was vital that national technology assessment institutions should co-operate, at least in a European context.

Mr CONNOLLY (*Ireland*).- I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important subject and I congratulate the rapporteur on his fine report.

Ireland receives much support from other countries in high technology, as foreign companies have brought excellent high technology to Ireland. They are most welcome, as they have shown us new methods of operation and technology assessments and have developed some fine programmes.

I should emphasise, however, that Ireland has much more to do and we shall need additional support for our technology. In the open economy of the European Union, it is essential to be highly competitive and that can be achieved only with a first-class knowledge of technology. It is most important that, in future, technology plays a dominant role in our economy.

The Irish Parliament hopes to put more funding into technology. That will enable us to plan ahead in our co-operation with other member countries. We are extremely anxious to exchange views with other countries and to see how they operate in this important new arena.

In my opinion, technology in Ireland is not of a sufficiently high quality and that may cause difficulties in our co-operation with other countries. It is essential for us to work with member countries, the European Union and other European countries.

The Committee on Science and Technology, of which I am a member, is most important and I welcome its report which explains all the problems and provides an overview. I look forward to hearing other opinions and evaluations. As I explained, high technology is new to us in Ireland, but we are ready to take up the challenge and we look forward to the co-operation of other countries.

Mr GOLU (*Romania*) said the report was excellent. It highlighted the important economic and social issues and set a climate for co-operation.

Technological development had wide consequences. Strategies needed to be well based, both at a national and an international level. He looked forward to shared responsibilities.

The rapporteur rightly underlined how science and technology involved questions of power. There were dangers facing those who did not hold the reins of knowledge.

Relationships between society and scientific change were complex; people felt both fascination and revulsion for innovation. Parliaments had to be at the forefront in setting priorities for scientific development. The cold war had shown the dangers of allowing science and technology to be developed without proper public scrutiny.

Politicians and scientists were now co-operating to a greater extent and this had to be encouraged. Central and eastern European countries had particular problems in scrutinising science and in Romania, for example, the parliament had only a limited involvement in these matters.

The draft resolution provided a solid basis for science and technology assessment and for parliamentary oversight.

Mr AVERCHEV (*Russia*) echoed those who had already spoken, particularly Mr Golu, on the importance of parliamentary scrutiny. The results of a failure to scrutinise science were evident in the Chernobyl disaster.

Although the Duma had extensive powers, the gap in understanding between politicians and scientists was a problem. Politicians had to make important decisions on scientific matters without proper expertise. It was important that scientific expertise, for example that of the United States, was made widely available. The draft resolution should be supported by the Assembly and he thanked those responsible for drafting it.

Mr LENZER (*Germany*) said that he had parliamentary experience of this subject. All parliaments were discovering that they were making scientific decisions without proper background knowledge, and that additional expertise was needed. The United States had led the way in this field with the creation of the Office of Technology Assessment in 1972. In 1973 he had tabled a motion for a similar body to be set up in Germany. Germany now had a government office looking at the consequences of developments in science and technology.

Co-operation between experts and parliamentarians was vital. It was important to remember that scientific assessment could never replace political decision making.

Politicians were accountable; they were elected. It was their role to create a framework in which science could be used for the benefit of the citizen. Technological assessment was a useful tool for this purpose.

Mr YABLONSKY (*Ukraine*).- The idea of scientific and technological assessment of parliamentary choice is very important, because scientific and technological changes have a real and constantly increasing effect on society. We have many examples of unexpected consequences in the history of the former Soviet Union as a result of hasty decisions. For example, the creation of artificial seas; the unreasonable placing of nuclear power stations; the big mistakes that were made during their construction and the regime of their exploitation. The terrible results of such decisions are well known. They include ecological pollution of cities and rural areas, and the most horrible, the most terrible tragedy for humanity that happened on 26 April 1986 - the accident at Chernobyl.

We have many examples now of unreasonable political decisions. Therefore, the assessment of scientific and technological choices is not only necessary but obligatory. The Ukrainian Parliament stands for openness and public debate of scientific choices. We also stand for new forms and methods of collaboration between the worlds of science and politics. But what kind of assessment will be the most reliable? The main point of that question is whether it will be a parliamentary structure, semi-parliamentary or independent. What will be its functions? What duties must it carry out? The main question is how we could finance its function in the budget.

In our parliament there are 24 deputy commissioners. We also have the following structures: the Parliamentary Institute of Legislation; the Department of Justice; the Department of Scientific Expertise; and the newspaper, The Voice of Ukraine. They fulfil the first steps of such choices, but, perhaps, insufficiently. In Ukraine, there is also a big network of scientific state institutes. There are about 1 500 research institutes and more than 165 higher education establishments - universities, academies and institutes. The State Committee on Science and Technology is also working. We have the National Council for Science and Technology, under the guidance of the Ukrainian President, Mr Koutchma. All of them, more or less, co-operate with our parliament in the investigation, assessment and use of technologies and scientific choices. Evidently, this co-operation is not always sufficient. Therefore, we must improve the forms and methods of that co-operation. It is a question of time.

We shall take part in international co-operation in technology assessment with great pleasure. We shall also take part in European parliamentary technology assessment. But the Assembly will know the difficulties that we are living through. It will also know that the situation in our country is very complicated. For the above-mentioned reasons, and some others, it is not desirable to begin to create the special technology assessment structure in our parliament immediately. In future, however, we will use any opportunity to solve this problem.

Our main task, and, I think, the task of all European society, is to organise the international scientific centre for the investigation of problems caused by Chernobyl. We hope that the Council of Europe will support our decision. Scientific and technological assessment of parliamentary choices can be realised through special parliamentary structures, the invited group of independent experts, and existing state research institutions.

Our parliament will solve the question within its technical and financial means, taking into account the experience of other European countries.

Mr TIURI (*Finland*).- The report by Mr Birraux is a good one and important to all of us. Nowadays, progress in science and technology is one of the main forces behind far-reaching changes in society. More and more often, politicians have to take decisions involving scientific and technological expertise; the decision-makers use experts to present and analyse various options. But most parliamentarians are unable to choose between the options because they lack the necessary background information.

As is stated in the report, parliaments are gradually losing whole areas of decision making to the government bodies and experts who do have the relevant knowledge. Hence, to avoid this, it is important that technology assessment bodies be created within parliaments. Such bodies will obtain and disseminate information in important scientific and technological areas, to help parliamentarians to adapt technology more closely to society's needs.

It is my pleasure to inform the Assembly that the Parliament of Finland has now formed a technology assessment body - a special committee with a secretariat has been established for this very purpose. This Futures Committee, which I chair, is special because, unlike all other parliamentary committees, it will not deal with legislation. Instead, its main duty will be to oversee technology assessment. In addition, it will study and contribute to the futures report which the government will present to parliament every four years.

I fully agree with the draft resolution, which states that parliaments of member countries should set up technology assessment bodies.

Mr SUDARENKOV (*Russia*) said that Russia did not have much experience of parliamentary control but there was potential for developing technological assessment in both chambers. They had contacts with other countries which would help them monitor scientific progress and its implications. He was very conscious of the need to do this as he lived in an area contaminated by the Chernobyl disaster. Russia would multiply its contacts in this area.

THE PRESIDENT.- That concludes the list of speakers. I call on Mr Birraux to reply to the debate.

Mr BIRRAUX (*France*) (*Rapporteur of the Committee on Science and Technology*) thanked the speakers. The first thing that struck him about the debate was the wide-ranging agreement that there had been on the demands of science and technology. They, as parliamentarians, did not have the expertise and so faced pressure from lobby groups. They needed help to make impartial choices. Another thread running through the comments made during the debate was that scientists alone should not decide society's needs. He had taken on board the point about the need to be modest and not to pretend to be experts. Another point to emerge from the morning's debate was the benefit of exchanging information and learning from mutual experience. Finally, scientists and politicians must understand one another so that they could explain to society at large why decisions had been taken.

Mr Golu was the first speaker from eastern Europe. The participation of eastern European representatives in particular was welcomed. It was heartening to see developments in the use of science and technology in eastern Europe which were beneficial to societies.

It was important to foster links with science and technology within an appropriate framework, and to have the proper parameters for choice. Scientific laws could not be circumvented but the aspirations of societies were paramount.

He thanked the Assembly for its support. There was a consensus that the links between parliaments and science and technology should be strengthened. In a democratic context, only politicians could make decisions to meet the aspirations of citizens.

Mr ROSETA (*Portugal*) (*Chairman of the Committee on Science and Technology*) thanked Mr Birraux for his excellent work.

All member states of the Council of Europe should ensure that their parliaments had access to information on scientific and technological developments. Such developments were often complex, and had potentially dangerous consequences. However, only a small number of countries had developed systems of technology assessment.

It was necessary to tailor technology assessment institutions to take account of the economic, cultural and political context in each country. There was a need for countries to follow an independent course. It was necessary for countries to be able to consider a variety of options with regard to scientific and technological development. Politicians should have a say in such developments. Offices should co-operate with each other to avoid wastage and duplication.

Elected representatives rather than scientists should take decisions. It was vital to have a variety of options to consider.

Politicians had to take account of both the needs of society and of the values of the Council of Europe, which placed importance on the rights and well-being of individuals. Science had to be at the service of individuals, not vice versa. The prestige of politics would be increased if the public saw that politicians were taking informed decisions on society's future. Members could best uphold European values at a political level.

THE PRESIDENT.- The debate is closed.

The Committee on Science and Technology has presented a draft resolution to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the whole of the draft resolution contained in Doc. 7482.

Will those in favour of the draft resolution please raise their hands.

Those against?

Are there any abstentions?

The draft resolution in Doc. 7482 is adopted unanimously.

(The sitting, suspended at 11.12 am, was resumed at 11.47 am with Mrs Fischer, President of the Assembly, in the Chair).

5. Statement by Mr Koutchma

THE PRESIDENT.- We now have the honour of hearing a statement by Mr Koutchma, President of Ukraine. After his statement, the President has kindly agreed to take questions from the floor.

(The speaker continued in French).

The accession of Ukraine had increased the geographical and political importance of the Council of Europe. With the elections in 1994 and the constitutional agreement of June 1995, democracy in Ukraine appeared more stable. Mr Koutchma's comments with regard to the adoption of the new constitution would be of considerable interest.

Ukraine had made a number of commitments with regard to human rights on joining the Council of Europe. The moratorium on executions was essential.

The Assembly recognised that 10 years ago Ukraine had been the victim of a catastrophic nuclear accident.

The final closure of Chernobyl would not be for four years, in spite of the serious risks it presented. The G7 had offered assistance, and it would be useful for Ukraine to say how it wanted the Council of Europe to help it. She invited President Koutchma to address the Assembly and looked forward to the exchange of views that would follow.

Mr KUTCHMA (*President of the Ukraine*) expressed his sincere thanks for the opportunity to speak to the Assembly. He was grateful to those who had supported Ukraine's accession to the Council of Europe, which was an expression of confidence in the Ukrainian people and its leaders in the process of reform.

Ukraine bore responsibility for transforming a totalitarian society into a democratic one. He was aware that Ukraine was one of the last countries to throw off communism and in the five years of progress towards democracy there had been a political struggle between democratic elements and remnants of totalitarian forces.

Ukraine had not yet adopted a new constitution, but he assured the Assembly that he would do all he could in this regard. When the Constitutional Council had drafted a final version of the constitution it would be discussed in parliament. All Ukrainians would then have the chance to decide in a referendum whether to adopt it. If they decided to do so, it would represent the culmination of efforts to create a constitutional Ukraine, which had begun in 1710.

The process of economic reform was now yielding results. The commitment to market principles was producing economic stability and GDP was declining more slowly than in the past. The rate of privatisation had increased, wages had risen in 1995 and higher industrial and agricultural output was expected. The government followed rigid

credit and monetary policies. Although there was still far to go, real progress was being achieved.

He was pleased with the assistance that European and world organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Monetary Fund, had offered his country.

The legislative framework was being brought up to European standards. It was essential to fulfil Ukraine's obligations to the Council of Europe. Certain parts of the population did not agree with policies necessary to fulfil international agreements, for example the abolition of the death penalty. However, the Ukrainian Government recognised that these had to be met. Ukraine was grateful for the Council of Europe's assistance in the facilitation of democratic and economic reform. It was determined to maintain close involvement with the Council's work.

There was concern in Ukraine about the increasing numbers of those returning to the country who had been deported during the years of communism. This was causing both political and economic problems.

Ukraine sought closer relations with both Europe and the wider world. An important development had been the signing of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement in 1994. It sought a free trade agreement with the European Union, which it also hoped to join in due course. Good relations had developed with the North Atlantic Assembly, Western European Union and NATO. Ukraine was in favour of a gradual and open-ended expansion of NATO membership, which ought to take a closer interest in the security of neutral countries.

Ukraine was keen to resolve the pressures for Crimean separatism, which were highly damaging. The autonomy of the region was guaranteed in the constitution.

He was convinced that no one in Europe was interested in seeing Ukrainian separatism set an example to other countries. Ukraine was in favour of civic peace. The situation in Europe did not give grounds for self-satisfaction and there were problems to be solved. The future of European security should be based on the indivisibility of security and should be comprehensive. International organisations such as the UN, Nato and WEU were capable of solving many existing international security problems. The Council of Europe had also done much to help in the field of security. Ukraine was developing bilateral relations with its neighbours. Ukraine had no territorial claims on any other country and would resist territorial claims. Its relations with its northern neighbour were based on the principle of non-interference.

Ukraine was co-operating with several international ventures, such as the Black Sea initiative. The economic and ecological dimensions of security were also important. In particular, Chernobyl was an international problem and it was unthinkable that it could be resolved without international co-operation. The attention paid to Chernobyl at the G7 summit was welcome. Ukraine wanted to co-operate in these international efforts. The main prerequisite for democracy in Ukraine was an independent Ukraine based on a civil society, the market economy, and the rule of law. Within the next few years they would have taken further strides towards democracy. Ukraine was making an effort to build a united and Europe.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you very much, Mr Koutchma, for your most interesting statement. Members of the Assembly have expressed a wish to put questions to you. I would remind them that their questions must be limited to 30 seconds. I would also ask them not to make speeches.

A substantial number of colleagues have expressed a wish to ask Mr Koutchma questions. To ensure that as many as possible are able to put their questions, I hope that members will not wish to put supplementary questions.

A number of colleagues have expressed a wish to ask questions on similar subjects. I believe that it will be for your convenience, Mr Koutchma, and for that of the Assembly, if I call them to put their questions as a group, to which you may then reply. The first group consists of questions on Ukraine's relations with Russia, and I give the floor first to Mr Kelam.

Mr KELAM (*Estonia*).- What is your comment, Mr President, on your neighbouring country Belarus's recent decision to reunite with the Russian Federation - particularly in the light of the recent decision by the Russian Duma to annul the dissolution of the USSR? What are the possible consequences of such developments for Ukraine and Ukrainian national security policy?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that this was a right that Belarus had and it had asserted its right.

Mr MUEHLEMANN (*Switzerland*) asked what Mr Koutchma thought of relations with his neighbouring countries.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that Ukraine had always been in favour of co-operation with Russia. Relations with Russia were part of their history. He was against the creation of supranational bodies.

Mr SOLÉ TURA (*Spain*).- Do you think that the present situation in Chechnya could have some influence on the status quo in the region and on your own politics?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that it was the Ukraine's policy to support the territorial integrity of Russia. He did not, however, support the way in which a solution was currently being pursued. Ukraine supported Mr Yeltsin's attempts to find a solution by peaceful means.

Mrs MIHAYLOVA (*Bulgaria*).- It is obvious that the newly formed coalition between Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is of great concern not only to the Balkan states but to Bulgaria, whose name has been mentioned by President Yeltsin as a possible future member of that coalition with the Baltic states. Do you commend that proposal?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that there was no way back to the former Soviet Union. The creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States had not worked practically, and any further such creations would meet the same fate.

Mr HEGYI (*Hungary*).- As the respected head of the independent Ukraine state, what do you think about the Russian Duma's declaration that the abolition of the Soviet Union was invalid?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that legally the decision had no consequences for Ukraine. The decision was merely an attempt to secure electoral popularity.

Mr MOTIU (*Romania*). - Would you agree to become part of the Russian Confederation again and give up your independence and sovereignty and accept the second-hand role that you had in the former Soviet Union?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that he was against supranational unification. Relations with adjoining countries should be equitable and based upon good neighbourly partnerships.

THE PRESIDENT.- The next group of questions to which one reply will be given consists of questions tabled by Mr Németh and Mr Bolinaga on the death penalty.

Mr NEMÉTH (*Hungary*).- On behalf of the Committee on Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, I would like to know whether, in future, Ukraine will respect the moratorium on executions. There are rumours that Sergej Draquonov, Vitaly Gumenynk, Danilo Krasnow, Anatoli Skiby, Zandr Zilfuqanov, and Sergej Tekucsev have been executed. I stress that the credibility of Ukraine is at stake unless you can prove that those rumours are false.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that Ukraine was aware of the need to comply with all its obligations.

Mr BOLINAGA (*Spain*) said that he was concerned about the case of a 24-year-old man who had been sentenced to death. He made a plea to Mr Koutchma to revoke the decision, given Ukraine's new role within the Council of Europe.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that he would pay close attention to the case.

Mr BANKS (*United Kingdom*). - You mentioned Chernobyl in your excellent speech. The nuclear complex at Chernobyl was due to be closed at, I think, the end of 1993, but it is still functioning and we read that it looks likely to continue functioning into the next century. Following the promises given to you, the agreement between the G7 countries and Ukraine over resources for alternative energy and the closure of Chernobyl, could you give us a progress report? Has Ukraine received any resources from the G7 countries to meet those objectives?

Mr KOUTCHMA reminded the Assembly that the danger was not from the operating units but from the 200 tonnes of nuclear fuel contained within the concrete casing. Feasibility studies for a new casing had been undertaken and another operating unit would close down this year, leaving only one still generating electricity. He believed that comprehensive measures were in place and pointed out that the International Atomic Energy Authority had said that the remaining operating units were no more dangerous than others of the same type.

Mr GJELLEROD (*Denmark*). - I wish to ask a question about energy, but from a longer-term perspective. How do you see the relationship between the development of a pan-European energy infrastructure and the economic development of your country?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that co-operation with the EBRD in the energy sector was a priority for national security reasons.

Mr MICHELOYIANNIS (*Greece*) asked what progress had been made towards the final decommissioning of Chernobyl since the 1995 agreement between Ukraine and the G7.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that no detailed financial procedures had been established.

Mr BEHRENDT (*Germany*) asked what other energy sources would be available to replace Chernobyl when it closed in 2000.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that two more nuclear reactors would be commissioned shortly and that the coal power stations in Ukraine would be refurbished.

Mr BIRRAUX (*France*) said that the secrecy surrounding the recent accident at Chernobyl raised doubts as to whether the old ethos which put production before safety still remained in place. He asked whether safety would be a priority in the future.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that Ukraine acted according to international standards. The IAEA was able to supply information and had not complained to Ukraine. Discussion of this matter was based on speculation in the Ukrainian press.

Mr MIGNON (*France*) was greatly concerned that the recent serious accident had only come to light some months after it had happened. He asked Mr Koutchma to assure the Assembly that information on accidents would be made available as soon as they occurred.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that sadly these incidents were not rare, and were common to a number of countries with such reactors, not only Ukraine. He promised to take note of comments made by the Assembly with regard to the provision of information and take action where necessary.

Mr SOLONARI (*Moldova*) asked whether Mr Koutchma intended to take action to resolve the question of property rights on the Moldovan/Ukrainian border. He also enquired what progress had been made to develop a free trade agreement between the two countries.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that he hoped to sign a free trade treaty based on agreements made between the two countries over previous years.

Mr SEVERIN (*Romania*).- What are the main obstacles, if any, to the conclusion of the basic treaty between Ukraine and Romania? In your opinion, what are the means of overcoming those potential obstacles?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that there were good relations between the two countries. He noted the number of agreements and the active dialogue between them.

Mr EVERSDIJK (*Netherlands*) asked how the volume of investment in Ukraine could be increased.

Mr KOUTCHMA replied that the main requirement was the further development of the legal framework.

Mr VALLEIX (*France*) asked what progress had been made on confirming the status of the navy of the former Soviet Union.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that this was an important matter for the Crimea, Ukraine and Russia. Some progress had been made, for example the stationing of the Russian navy in Ukraine had been resolved. However, the status of the base in the Black Sea still caused problems. Ukraine hoped to reach a solution soon.

Mr LAAKSO (*Finland*).- During your successful visit to Finland recently, I am sure that you were informed that we have a Swedish-speaking minority of 4.6% of the population and two official languages. What plans does your country have concerning the rights of national minorities, especially in respect of linguistics? Do you have any plans to have more than one language and if not, why not?

Mr KOUTCHMA confirmed that all opportunities for such rights were accorded to minorities in Ukraine.

Mr PAUNESCU (*Romania*).- What is your opinion of the effect of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact? For example, northern Bukovina was removed from Romania and given to the former Soviet Union, and now the southern part of Moldova has become a part of Ukraine. Should not these matters be discussed? Are you aware of the problems faced by Romanians in Ukraine?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that the Molotov-Ribentrop pact was not a question that should be addressed to Kiev. They had no right to question the order that took shape after the second world war.

Mr JASKIERNIA (*Poland*).- Mr President, in your excellent speech, you said that Ukraine was not against the expansion of Nato, but you added that you thought the process should be gradual. When do you think the time will be right to extend Nato? Can you comment on those politicians who suggest that the extension of Nato towards eastern Europe will be dangerous for the region and that we should rather seek another security plan for the region?

Mr KOUTCHMA said that this was a very complicated matter indeed. Nato only included democratic countries who had no territorial claims on their neighbours. Europe should not be divided into two camps. The views of all Europe, especially Russia, should be taken into account.

Mr YÜRER (*Turkey*).- My question has already been answered by the president in his speech.

Mr FIGEL (*Slovakia*). - I am grateful for the opportunity to have this debate and to exchange views on Ukraine. My question was also answered by the president. I want to inform the president that we will continue our discussions and debates in the

Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries in early May in Kiev and Sevastopol, and we are looking forward to that.

Mr KORAKAS (*Greece*) asked about the constitution of Ukraine and whether the increase in the powers of the president to the detriment of parliament was compatible with democracy.

Mr KOUTCHMA said that he did not know where Mr Korakas obtained the information that the president wanted to enlarge his powers. The constitution had been approved by the Ukrainian Parliament and it corresponded to all international standards.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you very much. That brings to an end the questions to Mr Koutchma. I thank him warmly on behalf of the Assembly for his statement and his remarks. We have had a chance to ask all of the questions that we wanted to ask.

6. Date, time and orders of the day of the next sitting

THE PRESIDENT.- I propose that the Assembly holds its next public sitting this afternoon at 3 pm with the orders of the day which were approved yesterday.

Is that agreed?

The sitting is closed.

(The sitting was closed at 12.58 pm).

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Correction

Official Report, ninth sitting, 22 April 1996. Page 19, line 2, delete "chairmen" and insert "candidate".

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Draft resolution adopted

5. Statement by Mr Koutchma, President of Ukraine

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Mr Bolinaga (Spain)
Mr Banks (United Kingdom)
Mr Gjellerod (Denmark)
Mr Micheloyiannis (Greece)
Mr Behrendt (Germany)
Mr Birraux (France)
Mr Mignon (France)
Mr Solonari (Moldova)
Mr Severin (Romania)
Mr Eversdijk (Netherlands)
Mr Valleix (France)
Mr Laakso (Finland)

Mr Paunescu (Romania)
Mr Jaskiernia (Poland)
Mr Figel (Slovakia)
Mr Korakas (Greece)

6. Date, time and orders of the day of the next sitting