

*Opening Address by Mr. Nicolae Văcăroiu,
President of the PABSEC,
President of the Senate of Romania*

Dear Mr. President of Romania,
Distinguished Members, Observers, Representatives of the BSEC
family and guests,
Dear Mr. President of the Chamber of Deputies,
Distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to welcome you in the capital of Romania and allow me to express my feelings of friendship and gratitude for your participation in this meeting. Our joy is even greater as the opening ceremony of the works of the Plenary Sessions is honoured by the presence of His Excellency Mr. Ion Iliescu, the President of Romania, and of Mr. Valer Dorneanu, the President of the Chamber of Deputies. Such participation represents a new and relevant proof of our profound trust in the future of this Organisation; it also relieves the importance granted by Romania to the development of its relations with the Member States, the co-operation with the BSEC Organisation, the Parliamentary Assembly and the rest of the structures of the Black Sea family, the intensification of the co-operation with other regional Parliamentary Organisations, the affirmation of the Black Sea area as a leading participant in the building-up of the new European architecture.

Esteemed participants,

The General Assembly in Bucharest has a special significance. It concludes the year that marked a decade since the foundation of the Parliamentary Assembly; throughout the year we all tried to answer an essential question: to what extent did the Parliamentary diplomacy succeed in contributing to the achievement of welfare, democracy and stability- aspirations shared by our nations- as well as to the promotion of good neighbourhood relations, strengthening of the rule of law values within the member countries and their neighbouring areas. A mature and pragmatic evaluation cannot ignore the achievements accomplished so far. An undeniable truth is also evident: the meeting of the goals set up so far requires a more pragmatic and better co-ordinated approach, a faster adaptation of our vision to the profound changes that take place at a national, regional and international level. On the other hand, we are at the eve of 2004, the year that will bring the historic enlargement of the European Union – a process also involving Romania, Bulgaria and other countries in the region which will join the EU in the near future. The new border of the European Union will comprise a considerable part of the Black Sea Coast. Undoubtedly, we are facing a huge challenge. Is the Black Sea family prepared to face this crucial moment? Let us admit that the dynamic of our actions has not always kept the pace with the rhythm imposed by the rapid changes on the continent and world-wide as well as by the globalisation phenomenon.

Therefore, the meeting in Bucharest represents a special occasion to have a joint position and moreover to agree upon a coherent and distinct action program. I should mention that, for the first time, on the Agenda of the Plenary Session, the European themes are prevailing: the Black Sea region within the context of the European enlargement, the creation of a European Economic space and a new neighbourhood of the enlarged Europe. The concept of an enlarged Europe opens an unprecedented prospective for the Black Sea region.

The elaboration of the new joint strategy must take into consideration the irreversible option of some member countries, also including Romania, to relate their destiny to the project of the

United Democratic Europe but also the jointly assumed goal of turning the co-operation at the Black Sea into an instrument for the affirmation of the values of democracy and the rule of law. The creation of an European Economic space would never be possible, or durable, without the integration of this market- taking into account the considerable energy resources, the human potential and the geo-strategic location. We are all aware of our complex mission, particularly because so far no joint EU – BSEC strategy has been elaborated. That is why, it is essential that BSEC, the Parliamentary Assembly and the constitutive bodies to focus and to concentrate their actions towards institutionalisation, developing the relations with the EU and the European Parliament, an integrated approach of the Black Sea region – based on the principles of the Barcelona Process and the Northern Dimension- also including the countries from Southern Caucasus.

To this aim, during the Romanian Presidency, we were particularly interested in strengthening the relations with the European Parliament, enhancing the co-operation with CEIPA, promoting the co-operation with the Parliamentary Dimension of the Stability Pact for South -Eastern Europe.

A special significance is paid to bringing the legislation in line with EU standards, setting up a legislative framework aimed at facilitating multilateral co-operation, implementing some priority projects from the energy field, transportation, communication, environment and tourism, the creation of a free trade area of the Black Sea, as part of the economic European sphere, speeding up the social, economic and political reforms.

Allow me to express my belief that the general debates on “intensifying the implication of the Parliaments in promoting trade and business opportunities in the Black Sea region”, a theme proposed by the Romanian Delegation will identify new manners for regional co-operation. The energy summit, held in September, in Bucharest-where I had the honour of representing the Parliamentary Assembly- brought a very important contribution in this direction. At the same time, we appreciate the fact that, the current meeting, tackles such complex issues as “the fight against poverty in the member states of BSEC”, if we consider the fact that poverty represents a painful reality for most of our states.

It is time to state in a clear manner that the implementation of the goals of co-operation at Black Sea and the promotion of democratic values are closely connected to the creation of a stability and security environment. The recent terrorist attacks in Istanbul as well as in the south of the Russian Federation- which we strongly condemned on behalf of the members of our Assembly- require an intensification of the co-ordination of our actions so as to fight international terrorism, organised crime, illegal migration, drugs, the traffic of human beings and arms, that threaten the progress and stability, the functioning of the democratic institutions, durable development and even the future of the co-operation in the region. New and sustained efforts are required for overcoming the tensed instances and in order to find a rapid political solution to the “frozen” conflicts. That is why the members of the Assembly can only greet and support the increasing concern of the BSEC in this problem. The plenary session in Bucharest must reaffirm our consensus on the necessity of strengthening the interaction BSEC – PABSEC.

In the meeting with the BSEC high rank clerks from September this year I firmly pronounced myself for the co-ordination of the steps of the governmental organisation and its parliamentary dimension. We particularly appreciate the activity of BSEC’s Presidency of the Republic of Azerbaijan and especially for organising the Foreign Affairs Ministers’ reunions as well as for energy and transportation. At the same time it is necessarily that the Parliamentary Assembly intensifies the co-operation with the Businessmen’s Council, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, the International Center for Black Sea studies.

At an institutional level, within the last six months, important documents have been finalised: “The Protocol on PABSEC Immunities and Privileges” which is to be sent for ratification to the Parliaments and the ‘Headquarters Agreement’ that is to be signed at the current meeting. The next step would be to grant a maximum priority to the revision of the Regulations that must answer the interests of all member countries, and the Assembly on the whole. The same message was rendered at my meeting with the members of the Working Group, in September this year.

The success and solidity of the Assembly are definitely depending on the degree of involvement of national Parliaments. The intensification of bilateral contacts, at all levels, the consultations on the themes of the Black Sea, can effectively contribute to an increase in the efficiency of the Assembly. Along this line I could also mention the proposal I submitted to the Committee for Legal and Political Affairs regarding the institutionalization of the “Yearly Conference of the Presidents of the PABSEC members Parliaments” .

The last six months marked progresses in the light of the initiatives launched by the Parliamentary Assembly, which laid the foundations of new components of the Black Sea family. The 3rd Conference of the Public Service Broadcasters from the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, held in Varna, in September this year, set up the statutory principles, thus offering the opportunity to create an institutional framework of co-operation in this important field of activity. On the other hand, the fourth Assembly of the Association of the Black Sea Capitals, held in Chisinau, in October this year, discussed various aspects of protection of the rights of children and families.

Esteemed participants,

In conclusion, I express my real satisfaction for having you as our guests in Bucharest and we hope that you will notice again the strong feelings of friendship existent between the Romanian people and the peoples in the region; I hope you will also witness the determination of the Presidency, the Parliament and Romanian Government to pursue bringing a substantial contribution to the affirmation of the European identity of the Black sea co-operation; and by this, our region will be able to take the place it deserves on the regional, European and international political stage.

It is my pleasure to officially declare open the works the of the 22nd Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation and in the end, I kindly ask all of you to act as a really united family.