

**South-East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly
Inaugural Session, 9 to 11 May 2014, Bucharest**

Message from the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

I warmly welcome the creation of the South-East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly.

This new organization will further enhance cooperation among the nations of South-East Europe, and will bring them all closer to full Euro-Atlantic integration.

All the members of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process are either members or partners of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and so need no convincing of the irreplaceable role played by such assemblies.

Contacts and dialogue among parliamentarians strengthen, deepen and broaden the relationships between nations. They promote mutual understanding as well as the sharing of expertise and experience.

The South-East Europe Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly will enhance the region's security and stability by promoting parliamentary cooperation not only in security, but also in the economy, energy, justice, democracy, education, the judiciary, and the rule of law.

Recent events in Europe have added a new urgency to these types of cooperation. There was real hope that in the new millennium Europe would be able to set aside the conflicts that had characterized its entire history and which had risen to new levels of destruction and horror in the twentieth century.

We were building a new Europe where relationships were characterized by trust, cooperation and dialogue rather than coercion, threats, and military force.

However, we should see Russia's actions in Ukraine as an aberration, a departure from the new norms of behavior in Europe, which we must condemn in the strongest terms. In fact, it should strengthen the resolve of the rest of Europe to continue upon its course of greater cooperation and integration. That course leads to a shared, prosperous future, open to all European countries with a common belief in democracy, individual freedom, and the rule of law.

The creation of the South-East Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly is another landmark in South-East Europe's progress towards that future. It provides a timely and vivid reminder that nations can set aside past differences, tragedies and conflicts in order to invest in a better future for themselves and generations to come.

The creation of the South-East Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly is an historic occasion and I wish this new Assembly and all its members a productive and useful inaugural session.

Hugh Bayley