

Dear Mr. Zgonea,
Esteemed Speakers of the Parliaments,
Distinguished colleagues,
Dear Guests,

I am pleased to be in Bucharest, the capital of Romania which has a deep rooted friendship with Turkey based on shared history, culture and values. I want to thank the host country Romania for the warm hospitality shown to us and to the members of our delegation.

South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) is a unique cooperation forum in the Balkans as an example of regional ownership that reflects common will and authentic voice of our countries.

Our meeting today carries another importance as we are having the outcomes of the activities carried out since the 8th Conference of the Speakers of Parliaments in Antalya in 2010. The idea to establish a parliamentary assembly within the SEECP had been proposed by Turkey at our meeting in Antalya. Therefore I am really excited and proud to address you here on the occasion of the Inaugural Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly.

Esteemed Colleagues,

Ensuring regional cooperation becomes important more than ever before in our age in which especially ethnic, religious and sectarian conflicts are incited and constitute a threat to global peace.

Balkans which witnessed great wars and conflicts as well as hosted various civilizations had given early signals for international developments and new periods throughout the history.

I believe there is no reason for the Balkans which harbors great potential in many fields not to constitute a good example for the world as a region where different communities and cultures live together in peace and tranquility by showing mutual respect to each other, as it was the case in the past.

It is our common responsibility to ensure security, stability, peace and prosperity at our shared geography. In this regard I believe that we draw relevant lessons from the past conflicts and divisions and develop cooperation and solidarity among our countries and people.

As we all know, the bonds that bind us to each other are not only our common past and values but also our vision towards the future. Orientation of Balkan countries towards Euro and Euro-Atlantic institutions constitutes an important anchor as far as the regional peace and stability is concerned. Within this framework, we support the integration perspective of Balkan countries with EU and NATO and underline the necessity to continue reforms in our region on all occasions.

Turkey, as a part of Balkans, hopes to see the Balkans not as the periphery but rather as the heart of Europe. Our common objective is to ensure that the EU enlarges by accepting new countries from our region as new members. In this regard, we appreciate the positive developments in the Balkans as important stages for the future of the Balkans and Europe.

Croatia has become a full member of EU by July 1, 2013. An agreement has been reached at the Belgrade-Pristine Dialogue Process on April 19, 2013 thanks to the courage and determination showed by the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo. Due to the positive developments during the Dialogue Process, accession negotiations with Serbia and negotiations for the Stability and Partnership Association with Kosovo have started. A new momentum has been achieved in Turkey-EU relations as well. Montenegro has been proceeding successfully in EU negotiations. The fact that Moldova is to sign the Stability and Partnership Association with EU is also a positive development.

We think that these developments, that we are pleased, constitute important stages for the future of both Balkans and Europe and hope that Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania make progress in EU integration processes.

I want to underline once again that we, as Turkey, hope Bosnia-Herzegovina possess a stable and working state structure by preserving its territorial integrity and sovereignty. We think that it is important for the international society to act together while drawing attention to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We closely followed the latest developments in Bosnia Herzegovina. In addition to the reaction of the people against the current socio-economic situation, the disappointment emanating from the impasse at the country's integration process with EU and NATO underlies these events. We sincerely desire for Bosnia-Herzegovina to overcome domestic obstacles and proceed at the EU and NATO processes.

Unemployment rate, especially among young people, constitutes a big problem in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although protests have ended, the reasons behind these protests stand. We hope that all political actors in Bosnia-Herzegovina analyze the reasons behind these events in a detailed manner and take into consideration

the valid demands of the people without discriminating on the basis of ethnicity. We also believe that the international society adopt a more active attitude in eliminating deficiencies in effective governance and defects emanating from the Dayton system. We, as Turkey, continue our close cooperation with EU regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We observe that the problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina are similar to that of all countries in this region. I think that common political and socio-economic problems in Balkan countries that strive for a common future highlights the need for the development of regional cooperation. Within this context, I want to underline the principles of “regional inclusiveness” and “regional ownership” that shape Turkey’s policy towards the Balkans.

Kosovo’s participation at the RCC has been important achievement within the framework of regional inclusiveness. Taking into account the historical progress achieved at the Belgrade-Pristine Dialogue Process, I find it really important for us to concentrate on the invitation of Kosovo representatives to all SEECP meetings and finding different formula for Kosovo’s membership to SEECP.

We know the developments that led to the cancellation of the SEECP Ohrid Summit last year. I wish that process had been governed in a better way. Nevertheless, I appreciate the participation of Kosovo at some meetings of the SEECP last year as a positive development.

I salute the Speaker of the Parliament of Kosovo and his delegation who are here with us today.

Esteemed Speakers of the Parliaments,

As a matter of fact, our work begins today with the establishment of the SEECP PA. We are going to deal with the issues of budget and secretariat at the next stage.

Although we will decide on these issues on the basis of unanimity, we believe that a permanent secretariat will be a great asset for the SEECP PA by providing a great contribution to the effectiveness of the process. I want to take this opportunity to present Turkey’s desire to host this secretariat.

Esteemed colleagues,

We believe that this kind of regional and international tests can be overcome by the integration of all Balkan countries with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. I sincerely believe that the barriers for the normalization of our region will be removed through mutual understanding, tolerance and sustainable economic development.

Our parliaments have important responsibilities in this respect. Making necessary reforms in this issue can be the first step. In addition to this, our parliaments contribute to the regional peace with the statements they adopt concerning the establishment of good neighborly relations.

Ensuring political stability and regional peace will bring economic development as well. It is very important within this framework to create a strong economic realm within the Balkans and at the same time apply policies that will decrease unemployment while establishing a just balance between economic interests and social realities.

Before ending my speech I want to touch upon the developments in Ukraine shortly within the framework of its importance as far as the regional and international peace and security is concerned.

We are following the developments in Ukraine with deep concern. Turkey advocates a solution to the crisis in Ukraine within the framework of the independence, sovereignty, political unity and territorial integrity of this country and in compliance with democratic principles, international law and international agreements. We support the role of OSCE in reducing the tensions in Ukraine. We do not accept an illegal fait accompli in this respect. We will not recognize de facto annexation of Crimea into the Russian Federation. We support meaningful dialogue of Russia with Ukraine. We attach utmost importance to the security and well being of Crimean Tatar Turks who are essential elements of Crimea and subjected to great pains throughout the history. We believe that the continuation of the dialogue between Turkey and Russian Federation is very important in this respect.

I wish SEECP PA, that we hold its inaugural session today, will become a platform for the development of new cooperation mechanisms in line with the common and prosperous future of the countries in our region.

At the end of my speech, I want to thank our hosts Romania once again for their hospitality and greet all the participants with respect.