

Inaugural Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly
Bucharest, 9 - 11 May 2014

STATEMENT
of Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu,
President of the Senate of Romania

at the Opening Session

Mr. President of Romania,
Mr. Chairman of the Parliamentary Dimension of SEECP,
Distinguished Presidents of Parliaments,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to participate at this Inaugural Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process, an event which celebrates 17 years of parliamentary cooperation in the region and the transition to a new stage of institutionalization.

The Parliamentary Assembly constitutes the response of parliaments from the 12 countries in the region to the need for a more coherent and effective action at parliamentary level, in support to their common goals.

We truly believe that this new political forum, created by the region and for the region, will offer us a viable platform for parliamentary interaction, by facilitating the exchange of best practices in legislative matters, and in other areas of interest for our work.

The SEECP Parliamentary Assembly, whose foundations embody the political will of Presidents of the National Parliaments in South-Eastern Europe, must be equipped with a range of tools enabling it to play a central role in the regional institutional architecture, while strengthening its status as a relevant stakeholder in the dialogue with other institutional actors beyond the region.

At the same time, the partnership that we begin to build today between SEECP and its Parliamentary Assembly must be approached in a pragmatic way and in close connection with the European Union.

One of the advantages of the new Assembly is that it gathers together parliaments of EU member States, candidate and potential candidate countries, and countries aiming at EU membership.

Romania has been and remains an active supporter of the EU enlargement policy for those South-Eastern European countries which prove political will to fulfill the accession criteria.

Providing a strong and credible European perspective for these countries is a key driver for democratic transition, while ensuring the development of a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship with the European Union.

We therefore believe that the actions of EU member States which are also part of the SEECP must continue to focus on supporting internal reforms in other countries of the region.

At the same time, we can not dissociate European integration from its complementary dimension, which is regional cooperation.

We need an integrated South-East Europe, in which the facilitation of political dialogue, the development of major economic projects, cross-border cooperation and a coherent approach to common challenges – including organized crime, corruption, or human trafficking – can make a difference in the speeding up of progress on the European and Euro-Atlantic path for countries in the region.

I hope that the new Assembly will play an important role in boosting cooperation between our countries, in all of its dimensions, and especially in the economic sector, as prerequisite for bringing prosperity to the citizens whose interests we have been mandated to consistently defend.

The States in the region have to address a number of economic challenges more or less similar, which require our utmost attention: structural vulnerabilities as result of deindustrialization; a diminished export capacity, a high rate of unemployment and, last but not least, the pressing need to make steps towards a knowledge-based economy in which the added value of human capital prevails, thus enhancing the net gain brought about by research and innovation.

Also, the development of infrastructure projects – transport, energy, and information – should be given priority on our political agenda, at both parliamentary and governmental levels, as it represents a critical means to strengthen South-East Europe's regional profile.

Economic welfare facilitates access to education, the driving force for disseminating values that are intrinsic to a fully functional society. At the same time, economic welfare enhances stability in the region, allowing for the full development of individuals, in a spirit of tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of others, regardless of their particularities

It is time to turn multiculturalism, a distinctive feature of South-East Europe, from a potential source of instability into a major advantage and a key ingredient of social harmony.

Preserving the identity of national minorities, their rights and their freedoms as enshrined in international legal instruments to which our States are or are expected to be part, creates the premises for bringing into effect the concept of „living together” at the widest possible scale.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new SEECP Assembly will undoubtedly increase the relevance of the South-East European Cooperation Process, a process which, after 18 years of existence, reconfirms its value as forum of political dialogue, promoter of democratic values and catalyst of collaborative relationships between countries in the region.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a time when the principles of international law and their enforcement are put into question, a time when the force of law is insidiously being substituted by the law of force. The security environment in the immediate vicinity of South-East Europe has become extremely volatile, with potential risks to regional stability, but also with a number of already perceivable consequences in our day-to-day life.

I therefore believe that the mission of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly should go beyond the rule book, so as to further empower national parliaments to play a pre-eminent role in building up a common space of democracy and the rule of law.

Thank you!