

DISTINGUISHED MR. SPEAKER ZGONEA,

DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES FROM SOUTH-EAST EUROPE,

DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS FROM THE OTHER PARTS OF OUR CONTINENT,

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

It is my pleasure and privilege to be present here today, at this conference convened to constitute the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process. This is a very special undertaking for all of us who uphold it at a difficult time for us, for the region we live in and for Europe as a whole. In its governmental dimension, this is an initiative which is successfully finding its own identity and is already bearing fruit in that it has contributed, right from its start and in direct and real terms, to the much needed initial impetus for establishing international mutual trust, which at that time has been absent, and making it last; and in that it has reinvented our efforts to enhance security and deepen the good neighbourly relations and cooperation among our states and peoples.

Over the past years, the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria has been assisting, in a continuous and active manner, the shaping of the strong intuitive feeling that a parliamentary format was needed to make cooperation more efficient. We felt it would provide a framework for the supreme legislative bodies in our respective countries to demonstrate their political support and to guarantee the needed legitimate conditions for the implementation of the efforts of the governments and the NGOs of the states from our region to improve mutual communication, to synchronize their approaches and to meet the jointly accepted criteria for democratization, bigger prosperity of the people and continuous and definite incorporation into the united European family. In this context, I believe that the wide field of inter-parliamentary cooperation that has been chosen and defined by us is adequate to its purpose. I also believe that all of us today who are attending the Inaugural session of SEECP Parliamentary Assembly can be pleased with what has been achieved, since the result lays the foundation of a qualitatively new stage in our inter-parliamentary interaction. Each of our respective states made its substantial, noticeable and united political and expert contribution to the consensus we reached today. In this connection, I would like to express my pleasure, and to convey my congratulations to our hosts for the huge amount of work they have done and to thank them for the excellent conditions they provided for the successful functioning of our forum.

The National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria would like to confirm its agreement with the results we have jointly achieved to date, and to express its firm intention to continue to follow this path jointly with all of you. I am confident that what has been achieved at today's conference will develop further, and will be suitably incorporated in the next Presidency of SEECP PA.

I wish to assure my Albanian colleagues that the Bulgarian participants will continue to work actively, as they have always have, during the next stage of setting up a functioning system that would meet

the conditions for the recognition of the merits, and significance of our region of Europe and that they will act in a competent and dedicated manner. We shall stick to our understanding that the goals and tasks of the Parliamentary Assembly need to be adequate to our times and to the present and future challenges that the states in the region are going to face. Their implementation will be outlined and defined through a well-organised and flexible communication mechanism to comply to the regional balance of the participating states. Last but not least, their actions will be guaranteed by an optimal and mutually adequate financial resource.

We have, in this field, excellent models of regional inter-parliamentary interaction. We all participate in different, sometimes partially overlapping, yet never mutually exclusive, regional cooperation formats. We follow with interest and attention the development of the cooperation among the Baltic states, we support and actively participate in the further structuring and bringing into action of what is called EU Danube Strategy, we note positively on the progress in the formatting of the cooperation in the Adriatic and Aegean region. Most of us have participated in the setting up of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation area and work actively within this framework. Positive synergy is everywhere, we are surrounded by regional cooperation formats and in my opinion this fully applies to our SEECP PA, whose geographic area and political will naturally contributes to making our region an important part of the European continent.

I am tempted to share with you an idea of mine which may sound abstract – or, shall we say *avant garde*, at present, but which time and the level of our future successful interaction will confirm eventually: I believe that through our joint actions we could arrive at such a stage in our common European identity that will make it possible claim the identification of a whole new European macro region, that of South East Europe and the Black Sea.

Regrettably, we are witnessing other, exceptionally worrying political developments in a region which is very close to us both geographically and politically. It is possible that we shall further witness deepening negative repercussions in the institutionalized cooperation processes within the already established framework of regional organization cooperation. These are events that unavoidably affect the state of bilateral relations. They also pose a challenge, whether direct or indirect, to the current integration processes in the Balkans. And while I am mentioning challenges, allow me to share yet another view of mine, namely that a challenge is also posed by the growing disappointment of our citizens in the pace of the association and enlargement process. More and more often, people begin to accept the compulsory adaptation period as a set of compulsory reforms which in time show no immediate impact on the quality of their life. These circumstances add to our responsibility and should make us even more dedicated in our path to peace, consolidation, good neighbourly relations and the accompanying economic growth and social development.

Distinguished Colleagues,

I believe in the idea of, and the opportunities offered by, multilateral inter-parliamentary interaction. I support dialogue, open discussions and collective political and economic commitments. Despite the presence of a number of new challenges, I remain optimistic for the future enhancement of the place, the role and the importance of the SEE region, and for the potential opportunities to tangibly raise the quality of life of the people in the countries in which we live and work; and for the implementation of our coveted goal, Europe with no division lines. Your attitude and your efforts toward the implementation of the noble goal we have been following throughout all these years

confirm to me – as they are confirming to you, that our efforts have not been in vain. Today's launch of our Parliamentary Assembly offers a valuable chance to give new impetus to the European prospect for the citizens of our countries.

In conclusion, allow me to wish our Parliamentary Assembly every success and to convey my expectations for creative work, and a strong political vision by the PA three General Committees as well as strength and dedication to all of us so that next year we would be able to congratulate each other with the new united step taken forward.

Thank you for your attention!

Bucharest, 10 May 2014.