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CONTRIBUTION to the general debate: Future role of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly in the European frame

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to warmly thank our host Romania for the excellent organisation of the conference, and in particular for the outstanding hospitality extended to us during these days.

Regional integration of the countries of Southeast Europe is one of Slovenia's foreign policy priorities. The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia is therefore devoting special attention to strengthening cooperation with the countries of this region. Moreover, Slovenia is committed to the "open-door policy" as far as further enlargement of the European Union is concerned. We believe, in fact, that the future of all SEECP countries is in the European Union, representing a guarantor of peace and stability as well as a driver of common progress and development.

In such regard, I would like to note that regional integration and alliance are useful also in the context of the European Union; recent years have indeed proved that the policies pursued by large European Union countries do not always work best for smaller countries. I am referring above all to the excessive austerity measures that some countries, including SEECP members, had to take in the framework of measures to exit the financial and economic crisis, but which have proved to be ineffective and too painful for the people.

It is therefore right that the countries of the region integrate and cooperate with each other, as only we know best all the historical, social, cultural, economic

and other circumstances in the region and only we can find the best solutions to common challenges.

In the light thereof, I see the establishment of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly as a historic event, providing the parliamentarians of the member countries a new platform for discussing and designing concrete initiatives and measures highly needed for the development momentum of the region.

At such point it is also appropriate to thank the working group which has done a great job preparing all the relevant documents. In particular, I would like to highlight the adoption of the compromise proposal concerning the functioning of the Assembly Secretariat, for which special thanks certainly goes to Romania currently holding the chairmanship.

At the same time, further efforts need to be undertaken to reach a compromise on the creation of the permanent Secretariat. I believe that the practice in other regional organisations has revealed that an organisation is much more outreaching and successful if it has a permanent secretariat. The solution whereby the Secretariat is provided by the country holding the chairmanship and the activities of the Secretariat are thus transmitted from country to country can in fact only be a short-term and transitory one.

I would therefore particularly like to call upon Bulgaria and Turkey to develop a joint proposal, thus showing a constructive approach and thereby allowing progress in reaching a compromise for the establishment of the Assembly Secretariat.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's meeting represents a groundbreaking moment in the development of the new Parliamentary Assembly and a new form of parliamentary cooperation. It is now on us to find a way to seize this opportunity.

Thank you.