



Inaugural Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly

General Theme:

«The future role of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly in the European frame»

Bucharest, Romania

May 9 – 11, 2014

Honorable President,

Esteemed colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to participate today in the inaugural formal plenary sitting of the new South East Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly, following a 4-year intensive preparatory process.

Our meeting today signals the upgrading of our parliamentary cooperation, which was launched in 1997 in Athens, where a meeting of Speakers of Parliament of Southeast Europe took place for the first time.

Since then, slowly, yet steadily, our interparliamentary cooperation has been enhanced.

This process has reached its successful completion today, with the establishment of our new Parliamentary Assembly.

At this point, allow me to avail myself of the opportunity to congratulate the Working Group members and the Chairperson Mrs. Podasca for their work on the Parliamentary Assembly Rules of Procedure elaboration. I wish to also congratulate and thank the meeting's organizers, i.e. the Romanian Parliament and its Speaker, and dear friend, Mr. Zgonea, over their thriving efforts to make the 1st Plenary Meeting of the South East Europe Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference is of particular historical importance and is a symbol of our parliaments' cooperation, which was limited, so far, to an annual Speakers meeting. By establishing the new Parliamentary assembly, our national parliaments are presented with a unique opportunity to play an increasingly active role and upgrade their engagement in the overall process.

The new Parliamentary Assembly shall strengthen our countries' existing multi-level and close intergovernmental cooperation, at a time characterized by critical political and economic circumstances, not only for the region of South East Europe, but also for the European Union as a whole.

Moreover, modern, common challenges often go beyond the capabilities of the governments to deal with them at a national level. It is, therefore, necessary to coordinate our actions on a common plan, mostly with the cooperation of the EU institutions.

Dear colleagues,

An enlarged EU is not only bigger and richer in terms of culture.

Its strength and dynamics mainly lie in dealing with issues of global importance. That is why the enlargement is an essential, independent chapter of European integration. For the countries of the Western Balkans this perspective constitutes a historical wager.

As one of the oldest EU and NATO member-states, Greece has fervently supported and will continue to support the accession efforts of all its neighbouring countries. It has been our country's firm stance and objective to ensure and consolidate a climate of stability and peace in our much-afflicted region.

It is our objective to contribute towards a successful Western Balkans accession process, and we pursue this as the Presidency of the EU Council.

In other words, we are following-up on the “Thessaloniki Strategy”, launched during the Greek EU Council Presidency of 2003. In this direction, a meeting of EU Foreign Affairs Ministers with the participation of Western Balkan candidate countries commenced yesterday, in order to revive the “Thessaloniki 2014” agenda.

At this point, I want to emphasize that my country’s priorities during the EU Council Presidency were set based on the needs of the European citizens. Growth and employment are at the centre. However, border safety is also a priority. All this, combined with the maritime policy, which is the horizontal priority of the Greek Presidency, we believe concerns all European citizens. It concerns us all, especially in light of the most crucial, possibly, European elections in decades.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The three newly-established committees that will operate in the Assembly’s framework, offer us the possibility to cover the full range of our common interests, to expand common opportunities and to pursue ways to tackle common threats in SE Europe.

More specifically,

The South East Europe Cooperation Process and its new Parliamentary Assembly may and must evolve into a lever of economic growth in the region; into a vehicle stimulating new job opportunities, especially for our youths plagued by unemployment;

To this end, we must take advantage of the new opportunities presenting themselves:

In the field of Energy, through the implementation of the new Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), transporting natural gas from the East to the West, our region may become a key energy hub for Europe and benefit from thousands of new employment opportunities that will be created for its construction.

Furthermore, one of the most important and core sectors for our region's economic recovery and growth is *Tourism*, which may become a source of many new employment opportunities, as well as of prosperity for peoples in the region.

There are also great perspectives in utilizing our *cultural heritage* and our countries' special features, through the

promotion of which we can create a pole of attraction for the region of Southeast Europe.

At the same time, *research and innovation* must become a basic pillar for the economic growth of our enterprises and production, if we wish to strengthen the competitiveness of our products and services.

In the field of *security*, our region is faced with multiple challenges. Combating crime, corruption, organized crime, human trafficking, weapons and drug trafficking, extremism and human rights violations must be a daily and regular concern, both at government level and at the level of legislative intervention by the Parliaments.

It should be our common vision to establish a “European neighbourhood” where violence or the threat of violence have no place. A neighbourhood where the principles of peaceful conflict resolution, respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles, non- intervention in another country’s internal affairs and good neighbourhood norms, shall be treasured and non-negotiable; a neighbourhood ultimately transforming from the powderkeg of modern European history into an optimal cooperation model. Not only because this is a natural and inevitable consequence of our national legislation’s harmonization with European standards, but

also because the political leadership has realized this and it is a right of the citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new Parliamentary Assembly must have a dynamic presence and, through its initiatives and actions, achieve regional and international recognition and respect.

Our goal should be for our Annual Session to include specific issues and determine concrete priorities and actions. Our parliaments, through the opportunity offered by the new Assembly, should submit and adopt proposals on joint project implementation in fields of primary importance, elaborated by our Committees.

Resolving the issue of the Assembly's Secretariat, by adopting the Rules of Procedure, shall contribute to the integrated, orderly and unimpeded functioning of the Assembly.

The first major step, by adopting the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, is being taken today and allows us to proceed decisively to the arrangement of procedural issues.

Summing up, I wish to acknowledge the already existing (in Sofia) regional Secretariat's significant contribution to our countries' parliamentary cooperation.

I would like to thank once again the Parliament of Romania and wish a good start and every success in the work and tasks of our new Parliamentary Assembly, above all, to the benefit of the peoples of SE Europe.

Thank you.