

PA SEECP Inaugural Session
9-11 May 2014

Opening Session
May 10, 2014

Speech by Mr Valeriu Ștefan Zgonea,
Speaker of the House of Deputies

Distinguished Presidents of Parliaments,
Parliamentarian colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and delighted to welcome you in the Parliament of Romania, on the occasion of this Inaugural Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly that we have all prepared and expected. This is a truly historic event, achieved through the combined efforts of all the legislative bodies of the SEECP participating States, thus demonstrating that they can put their common, long-term interests in the first place and leave aside their differences of opinion rooted in the past, detrimental to our present and our future. I believe the motto of the current Presidency – One European Future – eloquently illustrates this idea.

The exceptional level of participation testifies to the significance we attach to this event. I am particularly pleased to salute the Speakers of Parliaments who chose to manifest their support by leading in person their delegations at this session. At the same time, I cordially salute my parliamentarian colleagues who came here to contribute to the outcome of the efforts carried on during several years. I would

like to thank them all for their engagement in these efforts and their support to the generous ideal on which our Parliamentary Assembly has been grounded.

Finally, I would like to salute the representatives of a number of important regional and international organizations, as well as other special guests whose participation honours and obliges us.

As I was saying, the new Assembly will be the result of many years of cooperation of the SEECP legislatures which, in a visionary conception, set themselves to institutionalize the parliamentary dimension of this Process. The Assembly will replace the current format, that of parliamentary dimension, and will mark the entrance in a superior stage, entailing a deeper political engagement and a stronger responsibility on the part of our parliaments towards the citizens and the issues specific to our region. Parliamentary cooperation will contribute to better turning to account the huge potential of regional cooperation and will implicitly give an impetus to the Process of Cooperation in South-East Europe as a whole. Mention should also be made here of the fact that the European Union is the framework to which naturally aspire all the countries in South-Eastern Europe and that the destiny of these nations will be naturally fulfilled in the spirit and the letter of European values and standards.

Of course, we cannot look towards the future without recalling the past, without paying tribute and thanking those who laid the foundations of today's construction. The road to this inaugural session was marked by a series of fundamental acts: the Charter of Good Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South-East Europe, signed in Bucharest in 2000, that encouraged parliamentary dialogue; the Memorandum of Understanding on Interparliamentary Cooperation in South-East Europe signed in Sofia in 2008, that states the main objectives of interparliamentary cooperation, as well as the Final Declarations of the Conferences of SEECP Presidents of Parliaments; all these documents reiterated the wish to promote and develop the parliamentary

dimension. And, of course, the Final Declaration and the Joint Statement adopted in Ohrid in 2013, that consecrated the will to turn the SEECP parliamentary dimension and institutionalize it under the form of a parliamentary assembly, a permanent forum meant to favour the uninterrupted exchange of ideas and experiences as well as cooperation between the legislative bodies.

In particular, my sincere thanks go to the preceding Presidency-in-office of the parliamentary dimension that made possible the adoption of the Ohrid documents, in terms of which the Inaugural Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly was convened.

The Bucharest Charter of Good Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation fully expresses our conception, the way in which we see the functioning of this structure and the principles supposed to govern our interparliamentary cooperation. When taking over the mandate of the Presidency-in-office we responsibly assumed the objectives stated in the Ohrid documents: first, supporting the process of institutionalization of the parliamentary dimension and passing to the format of parliamentary assembly; then, creating the necessary conditions for the structures of the future assembly to be really efficient. As many of you know, we resorted to all the ways at our disposal to gather consensus on the main documents submitted to the attention of the participants in this session. I personally kept an extensive correspondence on the matter and had a large number of bilateral meetings in Bucharest and in other capitals with my colleagues, speakers of the SEECP participating States, but also with the representatives of the diplomatic missions of these States to Bucharest. At the same time, my representative in the Working Group, Ms Gabriela Podașcă, MP, carried on a very intense and laudable activity, as you will see when examining the Working Group Report. I take this opportunity to thank once again the members of this Group for succeeding in drafting the three final documents of the Bucharest Session, the documents we shall debate and

adopt – the Rules of Procedure, the Final Declaration and the Work Programme 2014/2015.

As you have noticed, our Session has a very dense and promising agenda. After hearing the Working Group Report we shall analyse and adopt the Rules of Procedure, a decisive document that will turn our Assembly into a true institution. Following that we shall engage in a debate on the role and perspectives of the Assembly, a debate that we hope will be as consistent as possible. Then we shall examine and adopt the Final Declaration, the birth certificate of the new interparliamentary structure, thus bringing our first day of work to a fruitful conclusion. Tomorrow, after the constitutive meetings of the three General Committees, we shall hear their reports and shall look towards the future, setting the landmarks of the Work Programme 2014/2015.

Before I wind up, a few words for our guests, the representatives of the regional and international parliamentary organizations for whose messages we wait with the most vivid interest, since they are going to share their experience with us and, hopefully, open prospects of cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Overcoming certain disagreements from the past, the Parliaments of the SEECP participating States succeeded in reaching a consensus as concerns the necessity to consolidate cooperation in South-East Europe under an institutionalized form, as an efficient and indispensable modality to ensure the development of the whole region.

I would like to thank you for your individual and collective contribution to the process of institutionalization of the SEECP parliamentary dimension and the outlining of credible perspectives for the new parliamentary dimension. At the

same time I wish you success in carrying out the workings of this Inaugural Session to which so many hopes and positive expectations are linked.