

Address in the Chamber of Deputies, Romania

Buna ziua tuturor. Va salut cordial.

Ma bukur sa fiu astaz, ku dumnea-voastra.

Va mulcumesk pentru invitacie.

Distinguished Mr President of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr Ciolaku,

Distinguished vice-presidents,

Distinguished colleagues parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a privilege to be able to address you on behalf of the Croatian Parliament and the people of Croatia in this great House, in the heart of Bucharest.

To do so in the year when Croatia and Romania mark 30 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations makes my address here even more special.

I can safely say that we managed to build an honest, solid and – I believe - long-lasting friendship.

We have achieved this by persistently pursuing various bilateral areas of cooperation.

We have also been doing it within the framework of our membership in the European Union and NATO.

But the interactions between our peoples date back far beyond the past 30 years.

Croats have been in Romania since the 14th century. They are actually one of the oldest Croatian minority community in the world.

They have been true pioneers of culture-to-culture contacts and a most precious link between our countries.

And I am sincerely looking forward to visiting them tomorrow in the Caraş-Severin County. We highly appreciate the efforts invested by Romanian institutions in supporting their activities.

I am glad we have a deputy representing the Croatian minority in this Chamber - Mr Slobodan Ghera.

The Romanian minority in Croatia is rather small in numbers, but its interests are important to us. We will continue to support its activities, as relations with national minorities remain very high on our Government's agenda.

Furthermore, on the Croatian peninsula of Istria we have a small linguistic jewel about a hundred people still speaking Istro-Romanian language.

Esteemed members of the Chamber of Deputies,

There are many similarities in the national and political paths of Croatia and Romania.

We recall that both our countries experienced transition from communism to democracy. Such a transition was highly demanding and it meant multiple adaptation - mental, social, political and economic.

But for the goals we shared - joining NATO and the EU – we were ready to put in the extra effort. And this, too, connects us.

Croatia's journey of democratic transition was completed after Romania's, with our accession to NATO in 2009 and to the EU in 2013.

And, allow me a brief historical reminder here: the invitation for Croatia to join NATO came from this very building, at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008.

As Croatian Foreign Minister at the time, I had the honour to be here then. So my return today brings back dear memories indeed.

Now, both our countries are aiming for deeper integration within the EU.

As you know, Croatia also chose to join the Eurozone. By introducing the euro in less than 8 weeks we will fulfil another strategic foreign policy goal.

But there are two more targets remaining, which both Croatia and Romania wish to achieve: membership of Schengen area and membership of the OECD.

Croatia is fully ready for joining Schengen. The latest European Commission report confirms that Romania is ready too.

I hope both Croatia and Romania will enter on the 1st of January.

When it comes to the other goal we share, membership in the OECD, we are working diligently on the next steps in the accession process.

We are confident Romania is doing the same. After all, it's all for the benefit of our citizens.

Our countries obviously have similar ideas about where they belong. But also about where our neighbours belong.

We want them – the Western Balkans countries, as well as Ukraine and Moldova – to join us in the EU. This, of course, means fulfilling all the necessary criteria.

We know very well that the path to membership is long and demanding. We also know that the benefits of membership are truly worth the effort.

But, as they say, it takes two to tango.

So the EU needs to strengthen its involvement with all these countries and increase its presence in our neighbourhoods. If we fail to act efficiently, others will quickly come to fill the vacuum.

Dear Romanian friends,

All these similarities between Croatia and Romania clearly invite our parliaments and other national institutions to continue cooperating more closely, to our mutual benefit.

Let us hope the businesses will explore their opportunities too. The potential for further growth in our economic relations is very significant.

The EU connectivity projects, for example in energy and transport infrastructure could be of particular common interest.

I will also use this stage to point out the positive perspective of defense industry cooperation, which may become another strategically important connector between our countries.

And let's not underestimate the power of tourism. Not just its economic impact, but also the people-to-people and culture-to-culture contacts it fosters.

Dear colleagues,

I have spoken about the similarities in our paths, about the current and future goals, and about the potential for economic cooperation.

Now, allow me to return for a moment to the early years of Croatia's independence, which were all but easy.

We had to fight for our freedom: politically, diplomatically and, unfortunately - militarily.

But I would say that all the sacrifices Croatia's people made in the 1990s make us appreciate our independence even more deeply.

These days Russia's aggression of Ukraine reminds us all of how freedom should never be taken for granted.

And the aggressor's patterns remind Croats of the same cruel patterns Slobodan Milošević used 30 years ago: from information manipulation to military aggression, from refugee crisis to committing war crimes. And the list goes on.

But from this struggle for freedom comes a profound understanding and the special sensitivity for the suffering of Ukraine and its heroic people today.

So Croatia will continue to provide support - political, financial, humanitarian and military.

Building on this approach, we didn't hesitate for a moment when Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada this summer asked us to host the First parliamentary summit of the International Crimea Platform.

The summit, held in Zagreb two weeks ago, set the stage for a clear demonstration of inter-parliamentary support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. And of condemnation of Russia's unprovoked and brutal aggression.

Both Chambers of the Romanian Parliament participated in the summit, along with more than 50 chambers of parliaments worldwide.

Allow me to use this opportunity to thank the Vice President of this honourable House – Mister Suci, and the acting president of the Senate, Madam Gorghiu, for coming to Zagreb.

Dear fellow parliamentarians,

Croatia sees very clearly the multidimensional support to Ukraine: from adapting your railways to putting your roads and waterways at disposal for transport from Ukraine.

We appreciate the humanitarian aid and your care for thousands of refugees, as well as all the technical support you provide.

We know what it means to have friends in difficult times. And with the help of friends like Croatia and Romania, Ukraine will surely win this war.

Still, the world we know is changing before our eyes:

- from climate change to the various consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- from the rise of political extremism and populism to the growing challenges to multilateralism and international law.

As unpredictability becomes "*the newest normal*", our shared values are seriously challenged.

In such a changing world, we, members of parliaments, representing the voices of the people, we have a role to play in safeguarding the values of our hard-won democracies.

We have a role to play in preventing the "rule of power" to prevail over the "power of rules".

We have a role in coming together to fight for the values we hold crucial: freedom, democracy and peace, respect for rule of law and fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Let's spare no efforts in this fight!

Dear Mr President Ciolacu, thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to address you.

And I thank all of you in this great hall for your kind attention.

Long live the friendship between Croatia and Romania!

Mulțumesc!