

**PLENARY SESSION
OF THE FOURTH SEECP PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
8-10 JUNE 2017**

ZAGREB

Mr. Vlad BONTEA, MP

Mr. Chairperson,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to take the floor.

Commend the work invested during the last year and for successfully fulfilling the mandate as Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly.

The motto of the Croatian SEECP CiO, “*Connection, Communication, Cooperation*” makes up a good summary” of the priorities and activities that we have undertaken during the last year, both at the governmental and parliamentary levels of the SEECP.

We highly welcome your priorities as Chair of the SEECP PA, which also touch on connectivity theme in the transport and energy sectors, as these two sectors can become the main engines to accelerate economic growth and bring prosperity to the region. Our Parliaments have a paramount role in supporting the timely implementation of such projects by providing the adequate legal framework for their development.

Connectivity should be the backbone of economic and trade exchanges between our participants and, in that respect, energy security in South-Eastern Europe is a key priority area. From our standpoint, energy security relates to economic security and, today more than ever, particularly in South-Eastern Europe, it relates to political security as well.

While dealing with infrastructure constraints, either in transport or energy areas, our dialogue should take into account the arising technological advancements, and therefore all of us need to consider the need to invest more in research and development in these fields.

Our Parliament remains fully committed to deepening cooperation in South – East Europe on the basis of an increased dialogue with our partners in the region on topics which fuel the main driver of SEECP – i.e. full integration of the whole region into the Euro-Atlantic family of free and democratic nations. Congratulations to our colleagues in Podgorica for their recent NATO accession. This confirms the impressive internal reforms achieved by the authorities in Podgorica and constitutes a reconfirmation of the Open Doors policy. We are convinced that the ranks of our NATO community of shared values and principles will thus gain in strength and will contribute further to the stability of the Western Balkans.

Since the establishment of our PA, Bucharest, 2014, our delegation has constantly expressed confidence that the PA should be instrumental in transforming the South East European into a more prosperous and secure area, as well as for the promotion of European values and principles in the region, focusing on the rule of law and human rights.

Enlargement has proved to be one of the most successful policies of the EU, with undeniable added-value in terms of the stability and prosperity it has brought to Europe and to its neighbourhood. It is a policy that fully maintains its relevance today and must remain a priority for the EU and for the candidate and aspirants to European integration.

Our endeavour for the immediate future is to redouble our efforts to support the partners in the region. The message is clear: this European policy has benefits for both the Union but also for the candidates and aspirants, in terms of standards and common values.

So the European perspective is indeed an essential driver for reforms. Successful reforms are also crucial for managing risks of destabilization in our region. Stronger democratic institutions render regional partners more resilient to the multiple crises, which already challenge all of us in Europe. So there is clearly a need to pool together our efforts and maintain the momentum of the reforms on the “fundamentals first” principles - rule of law, fight against corruption, public administration reform and economic governance, and it is precisely in these policy areas where our national Parliaments play the most important role, but also have the most demanding tasks.

One way to achieve these objectives should be putting in synch our regional efforts with the endeavours of the partners in the region towards meeting the EU accession criteria. Obviously, such an avenue for cooperation concerns the harmonization of relevant legislations with the European *acquis* and for this there are already existing and functioning formats. What we need tough is to use them effectively and avoid creating new ones whenever things might get delayed for objective reasons. Needless to say, this will bear positively also on the bilateral and regional parliamentary cooperation.

Before concluding we would like to assure the upcoming SEECF PA CiO from Ljubljana of our availability to support its future work which, we are confident, will enable further progress in areas of common interest. It is our conviction they shall spare no effort in strengthening the regional profile of the Process and in increasing its visibility in Bruxelles, by an enhanced interaction with the EU institutions and the EP.

Thank you for your attention!