

**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE CROATIAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE PRESIDENT OF THE SEECP PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY MR GORDAN
JANDROKOVIĆ AT THE FOURTH PLENARY SESSION OF THE SEECP PA
Zagreb, 10 June 2017**

“Connection – Communication – Cooperation: The Way Forward”

Honourable colleagues Speakers and Deputy-Speakers of Parliament,

Honourable representatives of the Parliaments of the Participants of
the South East Europe Cooperation Process,

Distinguished guests – representatives of inter-parliamentary and
regional organizations,

Madam Secretary of State,

Dear friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here today – at the Fourth
Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South East
Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP) – hosted this year in Zagreb.
Today's session crowns in a way our joint efforts over the past year. I
am pleased to be able to share with you some thoughts on our
organization.

First of all, I would like to highlight the exceptional and undeniable
importance of our Assembly. The Assembly unites the collective
political will that the SEECP participating countries invested – on
their own initiative – to reach their common goal of creating an area
of peace, security and cooperation. Stabilizing security in South East
Europe, economic development and European integration are common
denominators permeating the cooperation within the framework of the
SEECP from the very beginning. Our history is no longer short – this
year we are marking 21 years of the SEECP's existence and therefore
of parliamentary cooperation as well. That is something that should

make us extremely proud. We have gone through various stages. First we developed through the SEECP Parliamentary Dimension and the annual meetings of Speakers of Parliament, and in 2014 we stepped up efforts to create even stronger connections, we institutionalized the parliamentary cooperation and became a Parliamentary Assembly. Connection is our key word because if it were not for connection we wouldn't have stayed together for 21 years. Our connection is deeply rooted in our history, tradition, geography, culture, transport infrastructure, and especially in the economy – which, I believe, all of our countries want to develop. The development of the economy and economic stability, for which we undoubtedly all strive, cannot be achieved without connections with neighbours, connections with the environment we live in and without the political decision that we will, despite everything, overcome the often not so small differences, in order to fight for a better future of our citizens. That is in fact our most important task. We have been elected as Members of Parliament to complete it. It is a task we must not forget and for which we must constantly strive and make compromises, if necessary. That is the reason why we are here: to talk, to present our ideas, and at times when we might not agree on all things – to continue working on key links of our cooperation because they are evident and undeniable. Communication is, of course, a logical segment of cooperation and connection. And indeed, if we make the effort, communication can facilitate many processes and help us realize our common interests. Although it sometimes seems that we have come to a “dead end” in discussions about a problem and that there is no way forward, by encouraging further communication we can certainly reach the levels we initially did not think possible. Communication and goodwill have been the connecting links during the Croatian Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Assembly. By exchanging views and agreeing on them, sometimes by making certain concessions, we have tried to find solutions that all SEECP Participants would find satisfactory, and that is most important.

In order to facilitate ongoing communication with the public on what is currently happening at the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly, we have set up a sub-page, in Croatian and English language, on the Croatian Parliament's website containing information on the activities during our Chairmanship-in-Office. Hopefully, we thus contributed to the visibility of this important regional organization.

Cooperation is the core of our activity and it exists in many areas from building stability and security in the region, fighting security threats such as terrorism, organized crime, illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and even people, through economic cooperation, transport and energy connections, all the way to cultural, social and humanitarian cooperation in various fields. Neighbouring countries sharing a particular geographical area, by the nature of things, rely on each other and develop cooperation. Absolutely everybody needs cooperation, which can be achieved only through political dialogue, talks and negotiation, for which forums such as the SEECP provide a unique framework.

Having said all this, I must at the same time emphasize that we are all aware of the challenges we are facing. We live in a global environment where the events occurring at one end of Europe or even the world, almost simultaneously and in line with the system of communicating vessels, directly or indirectly affect the circumstances and events at the other end of the globe. This is something we can no longer avoid and where we need to find ways of giving a swifter, shared or at least coordinated response, in order to effectively prevent unwanted consequences. We live in times of great change and challenges, marked by various crises and tensions – from economic turbulences, migration crisis to serious threats to security due to growing terrorism. We are witnessing, unfortunately, an ever-increasing number of terrorist attacks across Europe. No one is

completely safe anymore and we must all together make great efforts and cooperate closely – especially through information exchange – so as to curb or at least reduce this extremely dangerous, global threat to the security of our citizens. There is, of course, some political turbulence as well, and none of our countries, I think, is immune to them. By cultivating democratic values, by parliamentarianism and constant efforts to strengthen the rule of law, we can certainly create an environment of balanced political contest and dialogue. Parliaments play a key role in that respect and I am convinced, dear colleagues, that we are all making our best to accomplish this task by promoting lawfulness, transparency and pluralism.

Speaking of the European Union, Brexit undoubtedly represents an important milestone in the European venture. I am convinced, nevertheless, that the foundations of the European Union will remain solid and strong and that by joint efforts and open discussions on the future of the EU we will define precisely which steps forward should be taken. Of course, the “way forward” includes the EU enlargement, and in that context I should like to emphasize that Croatia continues to strongly support the enlargement of the European Union (and of NATO) and remains truly committed to the European perspective and future of the South East European countries. In this respect, we will continue to provide our unwavering support to all the countries treading the European path. Including, naturally, through forums such as the SEECP. Because we believe that the European perspective is a powerful driver of change and reform and an extremely important factor for strengthening stability and security in the area of South East Europe. Although the European Union's appeal is sometimes challenged by scepticism due to economic problems or the rise of various anti-European political options in aspirant countries, SEE countries' EU membership is the key drive for their democratic transformation. Believe me; we know it all too well because we

ourselves, as you know, made that journey and our efforts eventually paid off.

And, finally, the Croatian Chairmanship of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly has done its utmost to be transparent, active and cooperative, available to all parliaments of the SEECP Participants – in accordance with our Chairmanship’s motto. We have, of course, built our chairmanship on the very valuable legacy of our predecessors. I would like to extend a special note of gratitude to our colleagues from Sofia who held the previous chairmanship, and of course to all those who had earlier paved the way for our Parliamentary Assembly, to which we wish a bright future. The year has passed extremely quickly. We have accomplished many tasks that were ahead of us, hopefully to our mutual satisfaction. Our colleagues from Ljubljana will have our wholehearted support for the continuation of work in their upcoming chairmanship-in-office, and we wish them all the success.

Thank you.