

Dear President of the Croatian parliament, dear colleagues

It is a great honor and pleasure, as Head of the Athens delegation to attend this plenary session, and I would like to congratulate the Croatian Chairmanship on the excellent Chairmanship of our assembly as well as on the organization of the meetings and the plenary session.

“Connection, communication, cooperation”, the theme set by the Croatian Chairmanship of the SEECF, highlighted the main focus of the continued regional cooperation efforts in terms of political dialogue, solidarity, connectivity, transport, energy and European integration.

Greece has long enough acknowledged that social, economic and environmental integration constitutes the basis of a prosperous future for the region of Southeast Europe.

Peace, security, stability and cooperation constitute the main goals to which we are all committed and in this context, all efforts have to be done in order to ensure connectivity.

Connectivity is the corner stone of regional integration. Greece as a member state of the European Union, had to overcome many impediments, due to its geographical position and its infrastructural deficit.

So close, yet so far apart, our region needs to set up the necessary structures which will allow the mobility of capital, people, goods and services within Southeast Europe, between Southeast Europe and the European Union, between Southeast Europe and the rest of the globe.

Historically, the area of Southeast Europe was considered to be the crossroad of cultures. Its geographical position turned out to be its dominant characteristic, along with the fluidity of ethnic groups, resulting in a constant political instability. Human societies in this part of the world have suffered enough, mainly due to the lack of a cooperative culture. The initiative of South-East European Cooperation Process proves that we are ready to remove any such impediments and transform them into opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration.

Integration between existing transport systems, to generate continuity and infrastructure development and institutional changes aiming to common safety, security and environmental standards, can solve existing traffic problems. Trans-european corridors, for example, as the Orient/ East-Med Corridor, can be expanded through the construction of new vertical corridors in neighboring countries. In addition, the promotion of multimodal transport solutions, by improving connections between ports, roads and railways is increasingly important for transnational commerce. The ultimate goal would be to facilitate the integration of Southeast European member states into the European market.

Automation and digitalization in the public and private sector is crucial. We must all learn to quickly adopt new technologies. Greece has managed to become the center of several new investment initiatives announced by some of the largest companies in the global ICT industry such as Nokia, Microsoft and HTC, thanks to the availability of skilled labor, the existing know-how and research capabilities, the strong Information Technology and Telecommunications infrastructure.

It is important that we all agree to accelerate our efforts:

- to implement reform measures to further open markets,
- to create a transparent regulatory framework that builds investor confidence and promotes economic synergies,
- to launch the harmonization of national legislation with EU standards and
- to remove barriers so utilities are managed effectively and efficiently and foremost to communicate all these efforts to the public.

It is of outmost importance our commitment to integration and close cooperation under the EU umbrella. Our efforts for economic and industrial policy reforms should be brought forward and communicated in public. The European Union's enlargement policy is an investment in peace, security and stability in Europe. The prospect and process of EU accession have a powerful transformative effect, embedding positive change, providing increased economic and trade opportunities, and improving quality of life.

Dear colleagues,

I believe that we all recognize the responsibility of our countries to closely work with the international community. I also strongly believe that through regional linkages, global connectivity will emerge, which is, after all, the ultimate goal.