

**Speech by President of the Parliament, Podgorica, Mr Ivan Brajović
at the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European
Cooperation Process**

10 June 2017, Zagreb

“Connection – Cooperation – Communication: the way forward”

Distinguished colleagues,

Your Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to have this opportunity to head a delegation of the Parliament of Montenegro at this year's Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process. I would like to use this opportunity to thank our hosts for the warm welcome and excellent organisation of the meeting. This type of gathering has been, for many years, an excellent framework for the exchange of opinions and experiences among member states, and it contributes to better understanding of regional developments and strengthening of good neighbourly relations.

Also, I would like to congratulate for the selection of the topic ***Connection – Cooperation – Communication: the way forward***, which in the best possible way refers to shared experiences from the past in the region of Southeast Europe, and, at the same time, represents our task for the upcoming period.

When I say “shared experiences from the past” I mean those that we are unwillingly remained of, but we must never allow ourselves the luxury of forgetting them, but also the ones that we are proud of and we have a special obligation to preserve, highlight and pass them down to future generations.

In the times when we used to forget about the importance of communication, which I see primarily as a constructive and sincere dialogue, and in wider context, as a realistic image of yourself and others

even when we do not share the same opinion with them, it was not possible to expect that we would connect and consequently cooperate.

However, I want to believe that those days are long behind us, that we have learnt from that, very often in a difficult manner, that we cannot do one without the other, and that, in the same manner that we share the same geographical space and inseparable common heritage, we also share the same challenges as well as opportunities for progress. For that reason, it is important that we have realised through this process, but also through other regional initiatives, that unity in diversity is a richness that we must cherish.

Today, together with all the countries of the SEE region, we are in various stages of an intense process of European integration. Some of our neighbours are members of the EU, some of them, as we, are the candidate countries, while other countries, I hope, will get that status soon.

What is in common for all of us is that all of our countries are undoubtedly determined to become a part of the EU and we all are making efforts to address all the challenges on that path through reforms. We also understand that our European partners are going through the process of transformation, and they maybe have different priorities at this time. However, it is important that we are all aware of the fact that vitality of any organisation depends on the freshness of ideas and new experiences, and that is something the enlargement process inevitably brings.

Montenegro, as a great number of countries in the region, has set NATO membership as one of its priority foreign policy goals. We have accomplished that, and by handing-over the instrument of ratification on 5 June, we have become the 29th member formally and legally. We think that processes of joining the EU and NATO are complimentary, due to the fact that both organisations foster the same values and have almost identical accession criteria.

We see integration processes as a chance to improve our community in terms of strengthening institutions, democracy, the rule of law, and economic situation.

Regardless of the fact whether some regional country aims to become NATO member or not, I am convinced we all share the opinion that this is a common area we all have to preserve, improve, and provide a long-

term peace and stability by partnering activities, as preconditions of economic and overall welfare we all strive for.

Through our conflicts, lack of understanding, through searching and preserving our identity and taking responsibility for our own destiny, we have seen that we depend on each other, that we are the closest to each other and that, no doubt, we have a minimum of common interests that can be implemented and thus we can have a unique voice when negotiating with the wider European region.

Communication, cooperation and connection are not solely a political category, nor dialogue at the highest level. We have to take care of human dimension in its most basic form, because our citizens are connected in many different ways. Infrastructural connection, as one of pre-conditions for strengthening cooperation and understanding among our nations, has to be in the focus of our policies. We must not allow the conventional channels of connection to fall behind modern types of communication. The same attention that we devote to innovations and development of new technologies to which we adapt on a daily basis should be devoted to modernising our roads on land and sea, our railways and air traffic. Improving connections is of essential importance for learning about differences, removing barriers and fear of the unknown.

We must not forget the importance of exchanging experiences and cooperation in the field of science and education. These are the key elements of the Berlin Process, which is today maybe one of the strongest ties of the EU region and the most certain perspective for our further connection. This kind of exchange of experiences should enable us to slowly enter the stage of closing negotiating chapters in the future, as a confirmation of the "EU open-door policy" for the new members.

We, as elected representatives of citizens, have the obligation to strengthen mutual cooperation on a daily basis, and in that manner do what our citizens sometimes do maybe better than us, given that their mutual connection in business, family and friendly sense has long overcome the borders of our states.

Parliamentary cooperation in the existing framework may also serve as a tool for rapid response to the current issues particularly important for the states in this area and our citizens.

That is, ultimately, our obligation towards future generations, because we have to leave them a region which is peaceful, stable and with clear perspective.

Thank you.