

ADDRESS OF MR. SAFET SOFTIĆ, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF PEOPLES OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF BIH AT THE THRID MEETING OF THE SPEAKERS OF EURASIAN COUNTRIES' PARLIAMENTS

ANTALYA, 8 -11 October 2018

Honourable Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Yildirim,

Honourable Speakers of Parliaments, dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to participate today in the Third Meeting of the Speakers of Eurasian Countries' Parliaments, and I take the opportunity to thank the organisers most cordially for the invitation. The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina is represented by Mr. Mladen Bosić, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and myself, the Speaker of the House of Peoples of the PA BiH.

We believe that the significance of such meetings is exceptional, particularly in the light of topics which are the focus of this event: discussions on economic co-operation between the countries of the region and beyond.

As far as Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, the Strategy for the Foreign Policy of BiH has defined the development of BiH as an open economy in the immediate vicinity of the common market of the European Union, and determined by its ability to increase its net exports through the increase of competitiveness by attracting quality foreign direct investment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a signatory to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, is committed to meeting the conditions for joining the European family, but it equally develops strong economic relations with other countries in the region, and beyond.

First of all, I would like to point out the positive trends in the area of trade and investment policies of the countries of South East Europe, which have recorded positive advancement and prominent results, from 2006 to date, within the CEFTA Free Trade Agreement. Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with Albania, Macedonia,

Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, enjoys the benefits of the free trade zone in accordance with the provisions of the CEFTA Agreement and the Rules and Procedures of the World Trade Organization and the provisions of the European Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to achieving good and quality economic relations with the Republic of Turkey, the Russian Federation, Iran, China, Egypt and other countries.

Record-breaking progress in trade has been achieved during recent years in trade with the Republic of Turkey and it is likely that the volume of exchange will reach the targeted billion dollars in the next year, which will ultimately accomplish the planned projects. We are optimistic about export of industrial products from BiH to the Turkish market, and our trade relations were further improved by increasing exports of agricultural products and food, especially flour. Similarly with the export of meat, where secured export quotas were ensured for the first time.

A remarkable progress in trade was also noted with the Russian Federation, especially with the export of fruit to the Russian market, after the abolition of the ban on apple exports from Bosnia and Herzegovina in July this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been negotiating its accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for many years. Joining this organisation is a very complex process which required the implementation of numerous reforms, in the past period, the adoption of a set of laws and accompanying regulations, and their harmonisation with the rules of the international trading system established within the WTO. This process was eventually slowed down by various additional conditions, as well as requirements for auditing legal solutions. Countries in the process of accession, such as BiH, have not been granted a special and differentiated treatment in the application of individual WTO agreements, nor the status of a developing country, which is still used by existing, economically more developed WTO members, based on self-declaration of their status in the WTO. In this context, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been granted the status of a transition country which implies that there are absolutely no privileges in this process.

Bearing in mind the complete liberalisation of trade with the countries of the Region (CEFTA, EFTA, almost complete trade liberalisation with the EU), and the fact that the largest part of BiH foreign trade (about 80%), takes place within the framework of these agreements, the importance of joining the World Trade Organisation has become quite relativized.

Noting the fact that the WTO defines basic principles and establishes the system rules that govern the world trade, it is clear that BiH's economy has an interest in doing business according to well-known, anticipated and transparent rules, which is one of the prerequisites for increasing the attraction of foreign capital into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to present my impression about the intention of the People's Republic of China to invest \$11 billion as part of the "Belt and Road" initiative in all interested countries of the Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed its political will and readiness for cooperation by joining the "16 + 1" mechanism which is a part of the "Belt and Road" initiative. China has expressed its commitment to co-operate with the Balkan countries on a multilateral basis. The opinions and general beliefs of analysts in BiH are that the conditions for talks with China are more favourable, without political conditioning, political inconvenience, and are focused exclusively on economic categories. China is an increasingly present country which invests in the energy sector, transport infrastructure and other high economy level projects. The only condition is to go through legislation in both Entities and at the state level of BiH in order to find ways to provide a simpler financial model which is what the Chinese prefer, and that the works are carried out by their companies. To reaffirm the aforementioned, we would like to point out that Bosnia and Herzegovina has recently entered into force a visa-free regime between BiH and China, which should facilitate the arrival of investors and increase the number of tourists.

Let me briefly look back at the importance of the Berlin Process, an initiative launched four years ago by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in order to improve regional co-operation, and the Euro-integration of the countries of the Western Balkans. In addition to the success of creating a positive atmosphere, meetings at prime ministerial and parliamentary level on the most important topics of today,

security, the fight against terrorism, organised migrations, crime, the search for missing persons, the Berlin Process is responsible for the establishment of two regional organisations: a Regional Youth Co-operation Office– RYCO, and the Western Balkans Fund, headquartered in Tirana. In 2015, the Balkan Investment Fund invested EUR 246.5 million in 11 grants, and it is expected that total investments will be around EUR 1 billion, which is extremely important for the entire region in the field of infrastructure.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express once again my profound belief that we will all witness better and more efficient relations in the economy, both the regions of the Western Balkans and all the Eurasian countries in the very near future. For that, we need political and every other stability. We who hold high-level positions in our countries are also responsible for this, and by working in the highest legislative bodies of our countries, we can initiate, encourage and make the right decisions for a better and happier future.

Allow me once again to extend sincere congratulations to you Mr Yildirm and the Grand National Assembly of the Republic of Turkey for the exceptional organisation of this meeting in this beautiful environment.

Thank you for your attention.