

**MEMORANDUM
OF UNDERSTANDING
ON INTERPARLIAMENTARY
COOPERATION
IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE**

Speakers,

REPRESENTING the Parliaments of the SEECP Participating States on the occasion of their 7th Annual Conference held in Sofia on 14 April 2008;

HAVING REGARD to the South East European Cooperation Process (further called SEECP) Charter on Good Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South East Europe, signed in Bucharest on 12 October 2000, where Signatory Countries committed themselves to firmly act in order to transform the region into an area of peace, security and stability in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation for the benefit of their countries and people and of Europe as a whole;

RECOGNISING that the future of the South East European countries lies in the European Union, with EU membership, as the ultimate goal;

RECALLING the **Thessaloniki** Agenda of June 2003, concerning the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries;

EMPHASISING, in this context, the importance of regional cooperation as an integral component of the European Union's relation with the countries of the region;

BUILDING UPON the political decision taken at the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Regional Table meeting held in Sofia on 17 May 2005 to develop a more regionally owned and led cooperation framework and to enhance the role of the SEECP in the regional cooperation architecture in South East Europe;

CONVINCED OF the great importance of parliamentary involvement, as an overarching theme, for the successful development of the Regional Cooperation Council and in support of the SEECP;

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the decisions and conclusions of the 11th Summit of the SEECP held in Zagreb on 11 May 2007 where the importance of parliamentary cooperation as an indispensable segment of regional cooperation was stressed;

BUILDING upon the useful and constructive experience of interparliamentary cooperation among SEECP participating states, drawn over the past years through activities held under the auspices of previous SEECP Chairmanships;

FULLY AWARE OF the achievements of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe through its Parliamentary Cooperation Task Force;

RECALLING the decision on the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council at the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Regional Table meeting held in Belgrade on 30 May 2006 and based on its Statute agreed at the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Regional Table meeting held in Zagreb on 10 May 2007, as successor to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in the region;

STRESSING the importance of streamlining parliamentary cooperation through the establishment of a Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in South East Europe (hereinafter referred to as the "Regional Secretariat") as a regional network for information, coordination and exchange and its unanimous support by SEECP Speakers of Parliament at their Sixth Conference held in Zagreb on 15-17 April 2007;

APPRECIATING the strong political, technical and financial support from the European Parliament, the European Commission and EU Member States in this process;

DETERMINED to further enhance parliamentary activities and initiatives between the South East Europe countries and beyond;

RECALLING the initial Conference of Speakers of Parliament of South East Europe in Athens in 1997, and bearing in mind the Procedural Framework for Parliamentary Cooperation unanimously adopted at the Conference in Skopje in 2001, which envisages regular forms of cooperation among Parliaments in South East Europe;

BEARING IN MIND the importance of the Final Declarations of all previous Conferences of Speakers of Parliament of the SEECP Participating States;

HAVE AGREED on strengthening and enhancing the commitment of Parliaments through the signature today of the present Memorandum of Understanding on Interparliamentary Cooperation in South East Europe as follows:

1. Synergies and cooperation between activities and initiatives in the field of parliamentary cooperation should be enabled and facilitated in order to reach a high level of quality, effectiveness and efficiency;
2. The main objectives of interparliamentary cooperation in South East Europe are to:
 - 2.1. Coordinate the efforts of national parliaments in support to the RCC and SEECP;
 - 2.2. Promote further capacity building and institutional strengthening of South East Europe countries Parliaments;
 - 2.3. Promote exchange of information, experience and best practices between national parliaments of the South East Europe countries at all levels (e.g. Speakers, Committees, parliamentary staff);
 - 2.4. Further encourage and assist efforts by Parliaments of South East Europe countries towards harmonization of their legislation with the *acquis communautaire* and other EU and international standards;
 - 2.5. Enhance links with the European Parliament and other international parliamentary organizations and initiatives, in priority those mentioned in Article 4.4;
 - 2.6. Further reinforce democratic institutions in the South East Europe region;
 - 2.7. Increase citizens' involvement and ownership of the reform processes;
 - 2.8. Strengthen the cooperation with the non-governmental sector due to its prominent role in raising the awareness for regional ownership and for the need of regional cooperation;
 - and
 - 2.9 Encourage the public and private sectors to propose initiatives and activities related to their field of interest with regional dimension;
3. National Parliaments are the main actors of interparliamentary cooperation in South East Europe and will implement the aforementioned objectives through the following mechanisms:
 - 3.1. A Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the SEECP Countries is organized annually. The Conference oversees the coordination of interparliamentary activities in South East Europe;

3.1.1. *The Annual Conference* of the SEECP Speakers of Parliament provides the political guidelines and ensures the strategic coordination and development of the regional parliamentary cooperation processes;

3.1.2. *The Annual Conference* is hosted by the SEECP CiO and is prepared with the assistance of the Regional Secretariat. *The Regional Secretariat* assists the *SEECP CiO* in formulating the policy guidelines of the SEECP annual parliamentary agenda and provides relevant input to the *RCC Secretariat*;

3.1.3. *The Annual Conference* is Chaired by the SEECP CiO Speaker of Parliament and is open for participation to the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council as a special guest, as well as to representatives of the European Parliament and other international organizations and partners as special guests, following the consent of the SEECP Parliaments;

3.2. Ad hoc extraordinary conferences may be organized, following the consent of the SEECP Parliaments;

3.3. *Sector-specific meetings and meetings on topical issues* may be held on an *ad hoc* basis at different levels such as Speakers of Parliament, Chairs and Members of Committees, Heads of Delegations to Parliamentary Assemblies, Secretaries General and parliamentary staff;

3.4. *Regular meetings of sub-regional and sub-sectoral formats and structures* of parliamentary cooperation, such as the Western Balkans Conference of the Committees on European Integration/Affairs of the States participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process (COSAP), the Cetinje Parliamentary Forum, the South East Europe Women MPs Exchange Project, are an integral part of the framework for interparliamentary cooperation in South East Europe;

3.5. A rolling, long term calendar of interparliamentary activities involving as many participants - representatives of the national parliaments as possible, is made available on the website of the Regional Secretariat. The calendar is updated by the Regional Secretariat's team.

Signatories will inform the Regional Secretariat of their multilateral activities so that the latter can act as information center.

4. The Regional Secretariat is hosted, following the decision endorsed at the 6th SEECP Speakers of Parliament Conference, by the National Assembly of Bulgaria, in Sofia;

4.1. *The staff* of the *Secretariat* consists of parliamentary experts partly appointed by the host country, and partly seconded from the countries of the region, preferably following the SEECP Troika rotation principle. The number, the appointment procedures and mandate of the staff are to be defined in the course of 2008.

4.1.1. *National Parliaments/Parliamentary Chambers of the South East Europe countries* designate national coordinators to liaise on regular basis with the Regional Secretariat in timely and productive fashion;

4.2. *The Secretariat* maintains close operational contacts with the *RCC Secretariat*, *SEECP Chairmanship in Office*, *SEECP Troika* as well as with the designated national coordinators within the *Parliaments/Parliamentary Chambers* of the countries of South East Europe;

4.3. In the light of the European Integration and the **Euro-Atlantic** perspectives of the countries of the region and of the key role National Parliaments have in the reform and integration efforts as legislators and highest representatives of the people, *the Regional Secretariat* maintains a close liaison and cooperation with a number of partners, most notably the European Parliament, which have expressed their readiness to support future parliamentary cooperation activities;

4.4. *The Regional Secretariat* serves also for the countries of the region as a focal point for cooperation with the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the WEU Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly,

the Parliamentary Dimension of the CEI, the parliamentary cooperation within CEFTA and the donors' community;

4.5. *The Regional Secretariat* prepares a draft *Annual South East Europe Parliamentary Programme* in consultation and close cooperation with the SEECP CiO and Troika, and with the RCC Secretariat;

The *Annual South East Europe Parliamentary Programme* presented by the SEECP CiO is adopted by the Speakers of Parliaments in South East Europe at the *Annual Conference of Speakers of SEECP Parliaments*.

The Signatory Parliaments express their gratitude to the donors' community, in particular the EU institutions, for the important assistance it has provided in the past and look forward to its continued assistance and cooperation in the future.

Adopted in Sofia on 14th April 2008, in 1 (one) original in English.



Miloljub Albijanić, Deputy Speaker, National Assembly



Luka Bebić, Speaker, Parliament



Liubisha Georgievski, President, Parliament



Marian Lupu, Chairman, Parliament



Ş. Güldal Mumcu, Deputy Speaker, Grand National Assembly



Norica Nicolai, Vice President, Senate

George Baescu, Member of the Chamber of Deputies



Georgi Pirinski, Chairman, National Assembly



Rifat Rastoder, Vice President, Parliament



Bujar Scendo, Ambassador, Embassy in Sofia



Dimitrios Sioufas, President, Parliament



Milorad Živković, Speaker, House of Representatives