

**WELCOME ADDRESS
BY PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO MR IVAN
BRAJOVIĆ AT THE XVI CONFERENCE
OF PRESIDENTS OF PARLIAMENTS
OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN INITIATIVE
19 MARCH 2019, BUDVA**

Dear colleagues from abroad and from our country,

Distinguished Prime Minister Marković,

Distinguished ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to greet you all, especially our dear guests whom I would like to welcome to Montenegro, where, I believe, they feel pleasant. Let me wish a special welcome to a delegation from the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, which became a full member of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative last year, and today they are participating in this type of meeting for the first time ever.

Progress and cooperation of a country implies close cooperation and coordinated action of legislative and executive authorities. This cooperation is needed for deepening political and economic cooperation of the region, which is the goal of this Initiative. This is why today we will have an opportunity to hear Prime Minister Mr Duško Marković as well as ministers of foreign affairs, culture and tourism.

Since the renewal of our independence, this is already the second time for Montenegro to preside of the All, and I am exceptionally honoured and pleased to have the opportunity to be a host of the XVI meeting of presidents of parliaments of this important forum for cooperation of our countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative gathers nine European countries with a population of over 90 million citizens. These are European Union members, candidates, as well as potential candidates for the membership. For 19 year of its existence, this Initiative has significantly contributed to building trust, intensifying cooperation, integrating and adopting European values and standards. Recognising the importance and potentials of this Initiative, the European Union has allocated significant funds for projects in the fields of infrastructure, energy, blue development, sustainable tourism and environmental protection, which represent a great development opportunity for our countries.

Montenegro, as a Mediterranean country for which the Adriatic Sea is an important development resource, is particularly interested in even more intensive participation in this Initiative, bearing in mind previous positive experiences and potentials of regional cooperation, as well as the support of the European Union.

Strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation, and continuous dialogue, are crucial for stability in the region. You will agree with me that parliamentary cooperation is an important incentive mechanism and a good basis for other forms of interstate cooperation. In my introductory remarks I will not refer in details on the topics that we will be discussing today. We are having here the PM, parliamentarians and ministers, and additionally I expect a lively discussion, as it is characteristic for us parliamentarians.

Montenegro continuously strengthens its institutions, aware that this beneficial for all of its citizens, as well as the development of society as a whole. Therefore, I think that especially we, elected representatives of citizens, by acting within institutions, should contribute to their strengthening, as well as to achieving our goals by constantly improving the level of democratic culture. I believe that this is also one of common denominators, beneficial for all our

states and societies. Acting within institutions is a proven value of the developed democratic states, and the parliaments - you would agree - are unparalleled forums for the exchange of opinions and the implementation of ideas, whereby adopted procedures and rules are respected.

The reforms that we are carrying out are first of all our inner need, and they are also part of our obligations on our European path. To remind, in line with achieved results, Montenegro is a front-runner among candidate countries, not only due to the number of open chapters, but also due to the adopted European policies in a number of areas. We see the reform of the European Union's internal structure and the integration of the Western Balkans countries as complementary processes. In our region, there is no dilemma concerning the European perspective of all members of the Initiative. Member states of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative have a different degree of development, economic characteristics and prospects, as well as the achieved levels of democracy. But the membership in the European community of nations is a common denominator. Both our similarities and our differences are significant for further prosperity and stability of Europe as a whole.

I am convinced that with synchronised action, we can create a prosperous region, attractive for investments that will provide economic and social growth and support the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union.

In this sense, the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, in its parliamentary and all other dimensions, is an important cooperation framework of our nine states. Through the implementation of numerous projects, the contribution to the protection of identity of the Mediterranean area has been given, and each aspect of cooperation is important in its own way, from traffic and energy connectivity, environmental protection, maritime cooperation and culture to tourism.

The exceptional natural beauty and biodiversity, as well as the rich cultural, historical and archaeological heritage of our region make the undeniable potential for development. That's why we put the focus of today's meeting on cooperation in the field of tourism and

culture and their interconnectedness. Culture is an important prerequisite for tourism development, which, on the other side is important for the efficient valorisation of culture.

Montenegro will continue to strongly contribute to the strengthening of this forum as a successful mechanism of cooperation and coordination of joint activities on the implementation of European values and standards.

We owe gratitude to the Executive Secretariat of the Initiative for the successful coordination and implementation of the activities of member states.

I am convinced that today's harmonised views will be a step forward in the cooperation and joint progress of our countries and the region as a whole.

I wish you successful work and I am looking forward to the discussion that will follow.

Thank you.