

**Speech by President of the Parliament of
Montenegro Mr Ivan Brajović at Part II of the Session
of the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the
Countries of the Western Balkans
27 October 2017, Budapest, Hungary**

***“Security Dimension of the Western Balkan
Co-operation: Contributing to European Stability”***

Distinguished colleagues,
Your Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me once more to congratulate our hosts on excellently organised conference and to thank for the opportunity to be a keynote speaker for this session.

For more than a decade, the Hungarian Parliament, which gathers under its auspices the presidents of parliaments of the Western Balkans countries, has the initiative which has proven to be a valuable forum of contribution to the strengthening of the European integration perspective among our states and the strengthening of security and good neighbourly relations in the region.

Furthermore, I would like to point out how important it is that a European Union member state continuously shares its experiences with its neighbours, and, with its active endeavours within the Union, represents one of the best ambassadors of the Western Balkans. Now I say “a country”, because we are here now, but certainly we must not forget the contribution given by all the countries of the Visegrad Group, which is currently being chaired by Hungary, and for us - the Western Balkans, this Group has been a role model for synchronised, meaningful and good neighbourly cooperation, which had significantly advanced their process of the EU integration.

By their history and tradition, our countries are an inseparable part of Europe, which, without a peaceful, secure, economically strong and advanced Western Balkans cannot achieve the long-term stability and overall prosperity.

In the past, the Western Balkans, but also Europe, have gone through a long and arduous path of division, conflicts and challenges. After these challenges we usually emerged stronger and more aware that only by mutual respect, by building trust between our citizens and our institutions, as well as by respecting the differences that will always exist among us, we can have a brighter future. The challenges that we are currently facing - migration, terrorism, organised crime, cyber-attacks, but also the challenges related to dealing with the consequences of the economic crisis, and in particular the protection of human rights, point to the

importance of reaffirming values such as cooperation, solidarity and tolerance, upon which the modern Europe rests.

Further deepening of our relations must be directed towards better infrastructural connectivity of our countries, which is a pre-condition for connecting our people and for economic development, so that our region can achieve the level of the most advanced countries. Only stable and economically strong states, turned to each other, can successfully resist to modern security challenges, risks and threats.

Here I want to emphasise how important is the fact that all the Western Balkans countries have a clear and unambiguous common goal of becoming a part of the European Union. When it comes to Euro-Atlantic integration, the situation is different, and, in our opinion, it is based on the legitimate right of every state to independently create its own foreign policy and determine its priorities.

With respect to everyone's positions, I have to say that for Montenegro, NATO was the only right choice, which guaranteed our territorial integrity, stability and economic progress.

NATO membership and membership of the European Union are two priorities for us, inseparable due to compatibility of the two integration processes, and the fact that fundamental conditions for admission and the principles on which these two organisations are based are almost identical.

This year we have accomplished the first one, when we became the 29th NATO member, thereby earning the right to make decisions equally and at the same table with the most developed countries and to contribute to the security, respect and expansion of the fundamental values of democracy and to fostering of friendly relations with all those who share the same values. Our reception has sent an important message to all those who aspire to join NATO, that the door of the Alliance is open to all those who, by their individual performance, devotion and dedicated work, fulfil all the criteria for membership.

Montenegro is proud of its anti-fascist heritage, and the civic character of our state that survives thanks to many centuries long multi-national, multi-confessional and multi-cultural harmony that we managed to preserve in the most difficult times. It is our greatest wealth and value with whom we have never and we will never make compromises. In difficult times behind us, we were a shelter for a large number of refugees, who found a safe home in our country. We are also proud of the fact that we build friendly and meaningful relations with all of our neighbours, and that there is no question that can endanger them in the long run.

I'm certain that only together we can be strong enough and determined to face all the future challenges. History has shown to us how devastating it can be when we lack communication or negotiation, and how strong we can be when we are ready to cooperate and when we are open to seeing the wider context. First of all, this involves going beyond the narrow framework of one's

interests, and understanding that the progress of any country in our region gives the impulse to the development of all the others. This also implies an open, honest dialogue, the examination of our own shortcomings that need to be eliminated, and sharing of our own and applying our neighbours' good practices. It also means more frequent, more meaningful and faster communication among our leaders, parliaments, governments, businessmen and all other segments of the society, so that our common voice could be louder in the wider Europe. Only in this manner we will be able to change the image of the Balkans as an area that produces more history than it is able to consume, and to jointly create an image of the region that has transformed all of its diversities and experiences into its own advantages, and, as a unique region, gave a new quality to the united Europe.

We, being the ones who gained the confidence of citizens to create policies on their behalf, have the greatest responsibility in this regard, therefore, we must never lose sight of the obligation that we have for the present and all future generations to provide them with a safe, peaceful, and tolerant region and Europe as a whole.