

PAM 10th Plenary Session

Tirana, Albania, 18 February 2016

Welcome Speech of H. E. Mr. Ilir Meta, Speaker of the Parliament of Albania

Distinguished PAM President, Distinguished Speakers,
Members of Parliaments and Colleagues,
Senior Representatives of International Organisations,
Excellencies Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first of all express my gratitude for honouring us with your participation in the 10th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean, in Tirana, and on behalf of the Parliament of Albania welcome you in our country.

I would like to wish you welcome in Albania – both a Balkans and Mediterranean country, a country that has always been at the crossroad of western and eastern cultures, with vital and tolerant people, a model of religious coexistence – a rare value nowadays, which makes us feel proud.

It is the first time that PAM Plenary Session is organised in a Balkan country and I am very grateful for such a great and significant participation, as compared to previous sessions. This participation is a clear indicator of the importance each member country pays to the role of parliamentary diplomacy as “soft diplomacy” and to this macro-regional platform of our parliaments.

In this Jubilee of the Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean, our common basin introduces us to a series of challenges, which seem to be not just regional, but are becoming important global issues that require a different approach of our joint efforts.

The Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean, since its establishment in 2005, has embraced the countries of our macro-region, which reflect a diversity of cultures, economic and social-political approaches – but united by aspirations and goals for a more peaceful and prosperous life for their citizens.

I believe that the reason why the Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean celebrates today its 10th anniversary is precisely because we stand united in the fight against intolerance, discrimination, extremism – features that create divisions among peoples.

The message of this jubilee session is that the countries of the Mediterranean stand united and we will jointly solve the problems of the region.

Therefore, I am confident that I express the shared opinion and vision of our member countries that the forthcoming 5 year period will solidify the activity of our parliaments to the benefit of security, stability and prosperity for all our citizens.

These three parameters are provided through the strengthening of democratic institutions, improving the efficiency of governance, accountability and increased trust in government institutions.

The peaceful existence among our peoples can be achieved only through cooperation and diversification of communication bridges – and in this regard dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy are crucial for the whole Mediterranean region.

But as we are convened here in Tirana during this week, we are aware that beyond traditional challenges our macro-region is facing some specific challenges that risk to undermine precisely those parameters that are necessary to ensure a stable development and stability.

The unprecedented migratory movement, climate changes and most importantly the return of hotbeds of conflict in the Mediterranean shores, require a joint effort, a much stronger cooperation than in the past and a new “agreement” among our countries in drafting a concrete action plan for the liberation of the Mediterranean from these challenges that threaten peace and regional development.

Two years ago, during our meeting in Marseille, we discussed on global economic crisis, which was challenging not only the Mediterranean region, but the entire European continent.

After two years, in addition to economic hardships we face the challenges of coping with the refugees’ flood, deepening of hotbeds of conflict and consequently the multiplication of criminal and terrorist activities, which openly challenge our governing systems and our values of democracy, tolerance and solidarity.

The catastrophic situation and the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the situation in Libya – and the consequences of this situation as well – need no comment.

We, in this part of Europe and Mediterranean, note with concern how the operation of facing these challenges, has shaken the foundations of European values and the very essence of free movement and trade, as basic principles of the European Union, which at the same time threatens the future of interdependence and cooperation that should exist among countries of the European continent and countries of eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

Unfortunately, the differences between the North and South, between the West and East are not reduced – on the contrary – they were further deepened and represent a real threat to the economic and social development of all our region.

This situation should make us much more committed through a more solid platform of cooperation among countries of the Euro-Mediterranean space.

Being the host country of this Assembly, I can’t go into detailed analysis on every aspect of pan-regional crises we are experiencing, but I think that during the proceedings of this jubilee session we should openly and constructively discuss on current challenges, in order to find an

efficient mechanism of intensifying inter-parliamentary cooperation, which will contribute in enhancing dialogue among all our governments.

Allow me to point out that the deepening of crises in the Mediterranean region has not strengthened cooperation in Europe.

We have all noticed in recent months how coping with refugees crises and recent terrorist attacks in Paris, have obliged many European Union member countries to reconsider the terms of free movement, building walls and barriers among them.

This approach contradicts the values of solidarity on which the union was founded. Today, it is being discussed the existence and functioning of Schengen area and this is intolerable.

Border controls are returning. Great Britain is considering exit from EU. Extreme right movements are increasing in some EU member countries.

Management of refugee crises has become a ping-pong game, which clearly demonstrates that there is lack of common will and plan of measures to deal with current challenges – which some analysts consider as existential challenges for the entire European Union.

Putting into question the existence of the European project should not only be intolerable – but above all it should be unimaginable!

Friends – a strong Mediterranean needs a strong Europe. And, in times of crises Europe should stand united and draft joint mechanisms and strategies to maintain cohesion, solidarity, free movement and the whole European project – as a necessary project for peace and stability for all our countries and societies.

Therefore, I avail myself of the opportunity to greet the Security Conference, held last week in Munich, which convened the main global actors to discuss on these crises that affect the Mediterranean region and threaten to spread further.

In this context – We as representatives of the peoples' will, but also as legislative platforms – have the responsibility to exercise influence and pressure on the executive institutions, in order to enhance dialogue and concrete cooperation among our countries.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean should be strengthened as the platform of inter-parliamentary dialogue developing a multi-stakeholder approach with various international UN agencies, with the European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE, the League of Arab States, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and all other regional assemblies and forums.

Political dialogue among PAM member countries, in particular with regard to current developments in the Middle East, has a special meaning.

Thus, hoping to have the agreement of all member countries, I encourage the Secretariat of Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean to advance with our joint parliamentary agenda,

promoting inclusiveness and dialogue, as fundamental principles of preservation of the democratic values on which our Mediterranean societies are based.

Believing that PAM should strengthen in all its dimensions, in order to be an even more efficient platform in dealing with the current social, economic and above all political challenges – I think that member countries should increase their commitment to the work and activity of this Assembly.

Recent years are clearly proving that there can be no safe Europe without a safe and developed Mediterranean.

Any negative development in the Mediterranean has immediate and direct effects in the European Continent. Therefore, a better coordination is needed among Countries of the Mediterranean and the European Union member countries, to propose a plan of concrete measures to address the numerous problems the macro-region is experiencing.

Problems related to the management of refugee crises, to the terrorist attacks and threats to our safety, trafficking of human beings, environmental challenges – and above all challenges of fight against poverty and unemployment – which cause a series of other problems.

Distinguished colleagues,

The existence and development of Euro-Mediterranean space are necessarily related to political, social and economic developments of Mediterranean countries.

I propose that during this jubilee session in Tirana we openly discuss about the harmonization of diverse cooperation platforms existing in the Mediterranean, in the European Union and other nearby regions.

Effectiveness of our joint efforts requires inclusiveness and open dialogue.

Parliament of Albania fully supports the strengthening of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and I would like to reaffirm here our sincere willingness to be an even more active country in our joint and concrete initiatives.

Your presence in Tirana proves the willingness of every member country to strengthen cooperation in the framework of Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean.

The great number of delegates from across the macro-region and other international organisations, gives us hope that this meeting in Tirana will produce concrete results for the concretisation of our cooperation.

I wish you a successful 10-th Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean and a pleasant stay in Albania – homeland of people that consider hospitality as an integral element

of his character, whereas the constructive approach is considered as necessary for our regional coexistence.

I thank you.