*PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO*

**JOINT STATEMENT**

Adopted at the IX Meeting of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees of European Integration/Affairs of the Countries participating in the Stabilization and Association Process of South-East Europe (COSAP)

The IX Meeting of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees of European Integration/Affairs of the Countries participating in the Stabilization and Association Process of South-East Europe (COSAP) was organised in the scope of Montenegrin Chairmanship of the Initiative, in Bečići on June 2 and 3, 2014.

Participants of the meeting were parliamentary delegations of the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro, as well as guests from the Croatian Parliament, the Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro, the Regional Cooperation Council, the Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in South-East Europe, the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation and the Hellenic Parliament, which represents the Member State presiding over the EU, as well as representatives of the diplomatic corps.

Having exchanged opinions and experiences with regard to the Stabilization and Association Process, the programme of accession to the European Union and new policies and trends in the EU, the participants of the IX Meeting of the COSAP Conference:

1. Greet the Council’s conclusions from December 17, 2013 on the Enlargement and the Stabilization and Association Process, in which the EU enlargement process was strongly supported, as a guarantee of democracy, peace and stability.

2. Find that the cross-border cooperation is a tool for strengthening the European integration processes and that it provides political stability, security and economic development of the Western Balkans.

3. Reiterate that the strengthening of the rule of law, improvement of independence of the judiciary, respect of separation of powers and checks and balances, as well as fight against corruption and organised crime are of vital importance for the accession process.

4. Point out that strategic planning of preservation of current and development of local and regional road and railway infrastructure is a key condition for faster economic development of the entire region and for strengthening economic, trade and cultural ties.

5. Emphasise that the unemployment in the Western Balkans region, as well as in the EU Member States, particularly among youth, is one of the greatest challenges which the decision makers are facing, so it is necessary to plan and carry out a sustainable and balanced local and regional development, and to coordinate better the activities of the State, Economy and Educational institutions, in order to find an employment model suitable to the market needs.

6. Recognise as an advantage the high level of trade integration of the COSAP Members with the Union and stress the need for bigger investments in education, research and innovation, as prerequisites for the growth of competitiveness of national economies, so that they can, after the accession, be better positioned at the common European market.

7. Point to the need for adoption and implementation of strategies of public administration reform, with the aim to rationalise the number of employees in the public institutions and collocate them in accordance with the actual needs, in order to make the public sector more efficient and professional, i.e. to achieve the effect of timely preparation for obligations arising from membership. Stability of public administration should not be affected by changes of governments and political interferences.

8. Recognise as the key measure of absorptive capacity of the state – preparedness of state institutions and regional and local structures, as well as participation of the civil society in programming, implementation and evaluation of the EU funds.

9. Call for continuation of activities targeted at improving the system of financial management and control of the EU pre-accession funds, with the aim to introduce the decentralised management of the funds and to prepare for the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund.

10. Assess that higher involvement of national parliaments in the European integration process will contribute to the intensity of fulfilment of the European agenda, and that monitoring of planning and realisation of the programmes from available European funds will additionally stimulate socio-economic reforms and provide the transparency of spending of the allocated funds.

11. Urge the governments of the COSAP Conference Members to make the integration process as transparent as possible, through the strategic approach in informing the public on the European Union, so that the citizens can form a clear idea of benefits and disadvantages of the future EU membership.

12. Call the national parliaments of the COSAP Member States to consider the possibility of organisation of bilateral meetings of working bodies, where policies of joint interest would be discussed.

13. Point to the need for stronger parliamentary communication with the EU Member States, with the aim to deepen diplomatic relations and give more information on the degree of fulfilment of obligations arising from the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

14. Greet the opening of negotiations with Serbia, the achieved progress of Montenegro in the negotiations with the EU, and expect the opening of negotiations with Albania and Macedonia. Fulfilment of conditions for submitting an application for membership in the EU and the opening of negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina is expected as well.

15. Underline the need to dedicate the first session of the meetings, starting from the next COSAP meeting, to the discussion on fulfilment of obligations from the Joint Statement of the previous meeting, in order to strengthen the Initiative in the ambient of existing regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

16. Welcome the great solidarity that was shown during the recent floods in the region and call for further support to affected areas, especially the help through the pre-accession funds and EU Solidarity Fund designated for emergency measures, and indicate the need for the establishment of a legal framework of regional cooperation that will enable the serious and long-term planning in defense from natural disasters.

17. Thank the Parliament of Montenegro as the organiser and host of the IX Meeting and express full support to the next chairing parliament – the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

Bečići, June 3, 2014