



Remarks of President Petros Efthymiou
Fall Meetings
Dubrovnik, Croatia – 7 October 2011

As prepared for delivery

Mr. President, Madame Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker and distinguished guests and colleagues,

What a pleasure to be here with all of you for the second time this year in a region that has seen so much progress and with colleagues who have led by example on international co-operation.

To the government of Croatia, the parliament, the Croatian Delegation to the PA, headed by Tonino Picula, and the city of Dubrovnik. Thank you all for such warm hospitality.

To the heads of OSCE missions in the region, we as parliamentarians appreciate you being here and we appreciate even more the valuable work you do everyday. We are fortunate to have such dedicated people like you as the face of the OSCE in this region.

Though this is the first time we ourselves have held such a large meeting here in Dubrovnik, the OSCE principles of comprehensive security, including military, economic and humanitarian dimensions have been here long before.

Seven hundred years ago, merchants from this area were said to be successful because they were not sailing to conquer and take but to co-operate and trade.

They knew their own fortunes were inextricably linked to their neighbors, whether they were a day's sail away or across an ocean.

These early traders sailed under white flags marked in Latin "libertas" – freedom – a symbol adopted when Dubrovnik abolished the slave trade here in 1418.

It was this commitment to freedom and peace that opened new doors and new markets to local sailors in ports worldwide.

Their commitments to freedom and prosperity then are no different than our desires today.

Here in Croatia, 20 years after independence, and in many surrounding countries, we see those desires fulfilled by governments and citizens who know first hand the benefits of co-operation.

They know you only get out of the OSCE what you are willing to put in, and they know the strength of our friendships determines the strength of our future.

And here, despite challenging economic times, the future is remarkably bright due in part to a steady resolve to work with each other and the OSCE in a partnership for progress.

Thousands of people have returned to their pre-war homes in Croatia and elsewhere thanks to governments committed to refugee return and the security of the internally displaced.

Hundreds of war criminals have been convicted thanks to prosecutors who accepted the notion that a war criminal is a war criminal no matter his country or ethnic origin.

And in Serbia, more than a hundred professional public procurement agents are now bringing a new level of trust and accountability to government contracting thanks to a new OSCE-sponsored certification process aimed at rooting out corruption.

All this, however, is not our success. It is the success of the people of the region and their governments. And this progress is sustainable only because it was achieved through the work of the countries themselves and their citizens.

The recent initiative by the presidents of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia in Brijuni to co-operate further in law enforcement, criminal prosecution and extradition procedures in order to fight organized crime and improve prosecution of war crimes shows the lasting effect of relationships first fostered through OSCE dialogue.

Beyond the work of governments on these critical issues, parliamentarians who have risen to power with intimate knowledge of the OSCE have found the Organization worth re-investing in themselves.

Our Assembly has a long tradition of work on both sides of the Adriatic, and our programs with parliaments on this side have helped create more transparency in government budgets, added a layer of oversight to security forces and ensured that parliamentarians share their own electoral expertise with colleagues in other countries during election observation missions.

Now, like those seafaring merchants from centuries ago, we must lean on each other again and use the international forum provided by the OSCE to rise above our modern economic challenges.

This holds lessons for all of us as we struggle to create new jobs in our own countries and dig out from the worst global recession many of us have ever experienced. In our discussions this week, let us strive for more creative solutions to our common cause of economic cooperation.

Surely this is the only way for our countries to attract investments, improve our roads, increase our broadband access, and diversify our energy sources.

But as much as we in our political capacities are focused on economic concerns, we shall never lose sight of the message of freedom that waivered from the ships sailing from this port 600 years ago.

That is why this month, for the first time, we will observe elections in the OSCE partner country of Tunisia – the first of the so-called Arab Spring countries to hold democratic elections.

We should all be encouraged by the strong interest in this election observation mission, but I also encourage more of you to register to observe in Kyrgyzstan, where 18 months after a violent revolution there is a wide-open contest for the presidency.

It is true, no matter which direction you turn in the OSCE you are surrounded by countries on the eve of historic moments – not the least of which is this one. Croatia should be proud of its successful work to integrate into the EU, and we look forward to the rest of its neighbors doing the same.

But there is already much to celebrate here – primarily the establishment of normal economic and diplomatic relations throughout the region. We should all be happy with the change that has transpired in a short 20 years time here, because this region is now showing freedom, security and prosperity are not values that stop at any borders.

They are the common ideals that live inside us all and shared commitments that we as parliamentarians, diplomats and government leaders must always work to renew.