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The Twelfth Meeting of the OSCE Economic Forum 2004

***“New Challenges for Building up Institutional
and Human Capacity for Economic Development
and Cooperation”
- Prague, 31 May - 4 June 2004 -***

ADDRESS

**on behalf of Romanian Chair-in-Office of
South East European Co-operation Process**

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to begin by thanking our Czech hosts, for their hospitality and for being a consistent and true friend to OSCE Economic Forum. Also, I would like to congratulate the Bulgarian Chairmanship of OSCE for choosing a topic of a particular relevance for South Eastern Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honor of presenting to you, on behalf of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mircea Geoana, Chair-in-Office of South East European Co-operation Process, the goals and objectives set out by the Romanian Chairmanship of SEECP for its mandate of April 2004 – April 2005.

Consolidating the vocation of SEECP to become ‘the voice of the region’

As Chair-in-Office of South East European Co-operation Process (SEECP), Romania is determined to give a new momentum to the regional cooperation, by promoting the development of a regional agenda based on the specific needs and efforts of the region and, also, an agenda able to substantiate the concepts of *regional ownership* and *regional leadership*.

With a goal to consolidate SEECP as the *voice of the region* and to increase the visibility of its activities on international arena, Romanian SEECP Chairmanship pays a special attention to cooperation with other regional initiatives. Its aim is to promote a coherent dialogue with other regional structures, in order to deal, in a complementary manner, with regional priorities, such as: fostering economic cooperation and growth, increasing employment opportunities and social cohesion, enhancing democracy and respect for human rights, as well as ensuring security and lasting stability in the region.

In this respect, Romania is willing to initiate a process of dialogue and political consultations on the common concerns of the region among various initiatives (Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, Central European Initiative, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Danube Co-operation Process) with the goal of consolidating SEECP as a relevant regional forum.

Enhancing the role of the SEECP as a platform for European integration

Throughout the Balkans, countries and peoples share European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and are in different stages of integration or preparation for accession to the European Union (EU) and NATO. The recent waves of enlargement of NATO and EU cast a specific strategic dimension to the region.

Romania believes that SEECP could play as a useful mechanism for enhancing the pro-European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and policies in the region aimed at accession, specifically in the Western Balkans. In this respect, SEECP could bring a valuable contribution and be an *excellent framework for acquiring experience in EU integration process*.

To this goal, SEECP Chairmanship is ready to act as *an active link* between countries in the region which are already members or in a more advanced stage of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, with those preparing to meet the accession criteria to EU and NATO, to provide a framework for sharing experience or disseminating the lessons learned in the preparation for EU and NATO membership.

As a regional initiative, SEECP can contribute streamlining and coordinating efforts towards European integration of the Western Balkan countries, by fostering *an increasing solidarity of Western Balkan countries with their neighbors that are in a more advanced stage of integration*, through initiatives originating in the SEECP, in order to allow a more efficient transfer to Western Balkan countries, of the know-how gained in the preparation for accession.

As EU is currently increasing its activities in the Western Balkans, Romanian SEECP Chairmanship has pledged to support the steps taken so far in the process of implementation the Thessaloniki Agenda, that guides SEE countries seeking EU membership, by consolidating EU-Western Balkans political dialogue and the European Partnerships for the countries in the region.

SEECP Chairmanship economic priorities and ways of action—economic development and growth

Having in view that economic development and employment are among many problems still hampering the full stabilization of the region, Romania set out in its SEECP agenda, the goal of stimulating the debate on issues essential to economic development, such as:

- Sustaining the *role of Small and Medium sized Enterprises sector (SMEs) in fostering entrepreneurship and employment* in the region; the conference on “Entrepreneurship and Employment”, organized by

SEECP CiO in co-operation with the EU Presidency and the Stability Pact in South Eastern Europe, in Bucharest, on 26-27 May 2004 successfully implemented this objective;

- Enhancing *regional energy co-operation by developing a regional energy market* and by promoting the project of a *Regional Electricity Stock Exchange to be located in Bucharest*, complementary and in close co-ordination with the *Athens process*;
- Strengthening *local democracy and cross-border co-operation*, by organizing a regional meeting aiming at building up political support for local capacity-building and proactive cross-border co-operation, while sustaining the establishment and development of viable *Euro regions*-type cooperative schemes in the region.

Enhancing cooperative actions to fight against transnational challenges to security and stability in the region

The success of policies and measures taken in one field, such as economic development and growth, cannot succeed in the absence of significant progress in consolidating a healthy environment, investment friendly, where democracy norms and human rights standards are respected. Fighting successfully the challenges posed by the new threats to stability, such as corruption and transnational organized crime and terrorism, will uphold the transformation and modernization processes in the region.

To this aim, Romanian Chairmanship of SEECP will seek to bring the activities of *the Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime, located in Bucharest*, closer to the work of SEECP, by organizing a regional seminar (at expert level) on border security issues.

Also, the objective of launching a *regional campaign on combating organized crime and corruption*, set out in the agenda of Romanian SEECP Chairmanship, has been already met. The campaign has been launched, as a joint commitment undertaken by the ministers of justice and home affairs from SEECP Participating States and from Croatia (observer), as well as from the Republic of Moldova, as special guests of the Romanian Chair-in-Office of SEECP, at Bucharest SEECP Ministerial Conference, on 17-18 May 2004.

The conference also decided to work towards adopting a SEECP Anti-Corruption Charter and to consolidate the inter-regional dialogue on bringing the institutions and policies in line with the EU acquis regarding the freedom of movement in the EU area and to promote a regional perspective on the progresses achieved in fighting corruption and organized crime at the next EU Western Balkans Forum in the Fall, this year.

Although military dimension remains essential for the security of the region, economic development, unemployment and weak administrative capacity to manage the political and societal change in the region become, day by day, key factors to the region's stability.

Bucharest Conference on Entrepreneurship and Employment in South Eastern Europe (26-27 May 2004)

In line with the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, Romanian Chairmanship of SEECP has made the development of a business-friendly environment and of SMEs sector, a major topic of this Economic Forum, one its priorities and set out measures to implement it accordingly.

In this respect, the Romanian Chairmanship of SEECP has organized a senior official conference on Entrepreneurship and Employment in South Eastern Europe, in Bucharest, on 26-27 May 2004, in cooperation with the Stability Pact and under the auspices of the Irish EU Presidency and with the support of the European Commission and OECD, aimed at addressing simultaneously the improvement of the business climate and the enhancement of employability and social cohesion.

The original concept of the conference, bearing on the idea of convergence between social and economic sectors, emphasized the positive link between a successful entrepreneurial environment and enhanced opportunities for employment. It stressed the need support the transformations in South Eastern Europe, by establishing a culture of entrepreneurship and helping the development of SMEs, and by improving employment, education and training policies. Also, it highlighted that SMEs have a key role to play in achieving sustainable employment and in the development of entrepreneurial spirit in South Eastern Europe

Participants pointed to the profound structural social and economic reforms, the need to adopt and internalise the *acquis communautaire* and to prepare the economies and educational systems of accession countries in the region, in order to meet the objectives of Lisbon Strategy of economic growth, competitiveness, employment and sustainable development.

The conference also called for further use and greater convergence of the Stability Pact instruments already available to promote these objectives, such as the OECD led Investment Compact, the European Charter for Small Enterprises, the private sector development programmes led the EBRD and other international financial institutions and the Council of Europe/ILO led Review of employment policies and of the performance of employment services of the SEE Countries further to Bucharest Employment Ministerial Conference of October 2003.

The conference pointed to a number of specific actions to be taken under the different initiatives, meant to ensure that strong political support for SMEs development and fostering sustainable employment is translated into tangible results.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to assure you that Romania will continue to make the best use of SEECP Chairmanship in order to contribute to bringing the European perspective closer to the citizens of South East European countries, to voice the region's aspirations and interests and to bring forward to the international community the region's solutions to its own problems.