Ladies and Gentlemen,

Colleagues,

I am very pleased – personally, and on behalf of the Baltic Assembly – for the opportunity to participate in the Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process here in beautiful Ljubljana and to convey the most heartfelt greetings from parliamentarians of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

The Baltic States carefully follow the developments of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process member states and know that you have a lot to be satisfied with. On behalf of the Baltic Assembly, I would like to praise the progress made in the fields of foreign policy, security policy and justice reforms; we appreciate the motto of the Slovenian Chairmanship-in-Office that is “See for Future”. As one of recent developments I would like to highlight the adopted strategy for “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced European Union engagement with the Western Balkans” and the ratification of the Border Demarcation Agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro, which represent real achievements in the spirit of good neighbourly relations. Your role in management of migration flows - a common challenge for international society, has been significant.
Ladies and Gentlemen!

The World does not become a safer place but rather more fragile and complicated with various fault lines, which challenges us on a daily basis, such as terrorism, conflicts, propaganda, military intimidation, cybercrime, populism and hybrid threats. Therefore, in the Baltic States, we do our best to strengthen domestic positions and capabilities. As members of the NATO and the European Union, the Baltic States recognise not only the provided possibilities, but also implied responsibilities. All three Baltic States already reached the 2% of GDP for defence spending, but we cannot safeguard Baltic region ourselves alone.

Since 19 June 2017, NATO launched multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania due to Russia's increased military activity at the eastern border. In this regard, I would like to express special appreciation to Albania, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia for deployment of your soldiers to our Baltic region that makes us feel safe and confident in our future prosperity. The scars of fifty years of Soviet occupation are still deep in the hearts of our nations.

Nevertheless, one should never stop on achieved undertakings. It is a well-known lesson for the Baltic States. Integration and becoming of members of the European Union meant shared democratic values, strong commitment to the rule of law and human rights. It meant reforms in our economies and fulfilment of obligations that apply for each and every country that are already members of the EU. Reforms that are serving Baltic States as a fundament ensuring stability, transparency, economic development, transport and energy connectivity.

The Baltic nations share strong affinity created by the long historical partnership between our countries and personal bonds of friendship between our people. Such bonds are also familiar to you. Regional cooperation and projects joining both members and non-members of the
European Union and North Atlantic Treaty are essential for promoting integration processes, sharing best practices and strengthening even stronger people-to-people bonds.

The Baltic Assembly expresses its support to the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process participating countries in their efforts for the EU membership and Euro-Atlantic integration and is ready to provide all possible advice and assistance. South East European region is part of the common security system and we consider your European integration progress as our common success.

Dear Colleagues! The Baltic Assembly is open and ready for deepening of cooperation between our parliamentary organisations! By using this opportunity, I would like to invite delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process to the 37th Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 24th Baltic Council, which will take place on 25 - 26 October 2018 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

I thank you and I wish you a fruitful Session!