

Speech for the 148th IPU assembly general debate on the topic “Parliamentary diplomacy:
building bridges for peace and understanding”

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a multiethnic and multireligious country where members of all monotheistic religions have lived with each other for centuries. The capital of my country, Sarajevo, is called the “Jerusalem of Europe” because there are mosques, cathedrals, churches and synagogues built five hundred years ago within only a few hundred meters. Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is very diverse and it is comprised of Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Jews. I believe that religious diversity in one society is an advantage, not a disadvantage. Every child will be richer and more tolerant if it grows up in an environment of religious and cultural differences. That is something that we will try to preserve and I want to emphasize that multiethnicity and coexistence is the true code of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Unfortunately, thirty years ago, my country and region of Western Balkans were faced with a devastating war that caused a loss of hundreds of thousands of human lives and destroyed cities, homes, infrastructure and the economy including the genocide in Srebrenica. Because of this and having in mind our experience, we know best the importance of peace and that building bridges for peace and mutual understanding is the most important task and goal for every government and every parliament. Because without long-term peace and stability there is no progress and development. The 21st century in which we live is a time of geopolitical challenges that will lead to the establishment of a new world order that will require a coherent strategy and the harmonization of different national and regional orders within agreed rules, principles and goals and what is equally important, jointly defined limitations in ways and models of action. That is why we in Bosnia and Herzegovina want to be partners and participants in all actions for peace and cooperation.

With that in mind I am pleased to inform you that the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina hosted a significant international conference over a month ago in Sarajevo, called “Members of Parliaments and Religious Leaders for Peace and Coexistence” with over 400 participants from around the world. The IPU also had its representatives at this Conference where we aimed to

bring together religious leaders from all religion communities and parliamentarians to jointly convey messages of mutual understanding, coexistence and tolerance. As the final conclusion of the Conference we adopted the Sarajevo Declaration a very important document that contains and unifies these universal messages.

And finally, in terms of one of our two main foreign priorities which is EU membership it is my honour to inform you that European Council a few days ago decided to open negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina for full EU membership. That means that my country is on no back tracks for EU and that we fully share values of democracy and peace and that we are in line with common EU foreign policy and security issues. That is historical step forward for all citizens of my country towards lasting peace and prosperity. This is, among the rest, result of parliamentary diplomacy. We are going to continue work to ensure peace and safe environment for all citizens of my country and in Western Balkans region, because in todays challenging times we need not clash of civilizations but dialogue and cooperation of civilizations. I hope to see you at one of the next conferences in my country in Sarajevo.

Thank you for your attention and everyone is welcome to Sarajevo.