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**Meeting of Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments,
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-Draft speech-**

***Session 3: Cooperation between parliaments of EU Member States and
parliaments of candidate countries***

Distinguished Mr. Đerđi Šuh (*György Such*),

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Colleagues,

Allow me to greet you on behalf of the National Assembly and on my own behalf and say that it is my pleasure to have today an opportunity to participate as a speaker in the Meeting of Secretaries General of Parliaments of EU Member States.

First of all, I wish to thank the organisers of the Meeting – the Hungarian Parliament, for an exceptionally well-organised event and I would emphasise that, for all of us who come from candidate countries, it is important to participate in all meetings that provide us with the opportunity to exchange experiences with colleagues from the EU, as well as with colleagues from candidate countries given that EU accession is a strategic commitment for all of us. All political actors and all state authorities conducting the EU association process in the Republic of Serbia, including the National Assembly, face the need for joint, coordinated and efficient action with relevant institutions of the EU and Member States in order to meet the conditions for EU association and accession.

Cooperation between parliaments of EU Member States and parliaments of candidate countries is an important aspect of the EU accession process. This cooperation supports the democratic process, institutional capacity building, as well as the harmonisation of the legal system of candidate countries with the EU acquis. This cooperation takes place through various mechanisms. Those mechanisms include traditional parliamentary bilateral cooperation, parliamentary conferences, twinning programmes, regional and EU parliamentary initiatives, as well as bilateral political and technical agreements.

The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia has a well-developed **bilateral cooperation with parliaments** of EU Member States and candidate countries. This cooperation takes place both at the political level and at the level of cooperation between parliaments' services.

During the previous year alone, visits of delegations of parliaments from Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Malta to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia were implemented. In addition, delegations of the Serbian Parliament (NARS) visited the parliaments of Belgium and Slovenia.

As an important form of parliamentary cooperation, I also wish to highlight **parliamentary friendship groups**. These are parliamentary bodies established within the National Assembly, aimed at improving relations and cooperation between Serbia and other countries. Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFG) are established on a voluntary basis and based on mutually expressed interests in developing the cooperation between certain countries. Some Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFG) are more active, some less. In the Serbian Parliament (NARS), Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFG) with EU Member States traditionally have the largest number of members and are the most active groups, and the Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFG) with Germany and France are the most active. The Parliamentary Friendship Group with Hungary is one of the groups with the most members, and cooperation between Serbia and Hungary is also an excellent example of cooperation, not just economic but also cooperation in the EU integration process where Hungary provides significant support to Serbia. Last year, members of the Parliamentary Friendship Group (PFG) of the Bundestag and the Parliamentary Friendship Group (PFG) of the Hungarian Parliament visited the Serbian Parliament (NARS).

The Serbian Parliament (NARS) also has very well-developed cooperation with the **European Parliament**. The cooperation between the representatives of

the National Assembly and the European Parliament was established in 2004, in the form of regular annual meetings of the Inter-parliamentary Dialogue. The cooperation of the two Parliaments in this form lasted until the entry into force of the SAA, when the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) was formed, which raised this cooperation to a higher institutional level. It is also important to mention the annual visit of the European Parliament's rapporteur for Serbia that is implemented in order to prepare a report in the form of a resolution, the text of which is proposed by the European Parliament's rapporteur for Serbia. The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia also intensively cooperates, through the European Integration Department, with the European Parliament's Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments, whose remit includes, among other things, organising seminars, conferences and round tables for MPs and staff of national parliaments of member states and candidate countries.

Through its European Integration Committee, the National Assembly participates in the activities of the Conference of the European Integration/Affairs Committees of States Participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process of South-East Europe (**COSAP**). This Conference is of great relevance for the very development of a candidate countries' European integration process. In this regard, I wish to emphasise that in the first half of November last year, the 20th COSAP meeting was successfully held in the National Assembly of Serbia as it resulted in the adoption of a joint declaration that had not been passed for quite some time. The National Assembly also participates as an observer in the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (**COSAC**).

The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia uses the **IPEX** Platform. The possibility of using this network for an online interparliamentary exchange of information, has great importance for our institution as well, as it is also open for EU candidate countries' parliaments. Being an EU candidate country that has been in the negotiation process for some time now, makes the significance of this platform even clearer, as it is a database containing relevant legal and political acts important for our EU integration process.

As for the technical **cooperation between our respective staff members**, in the period preceding the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, due to comparable political experiences in the EU integration process, particularly important for the Serbian Parliament's staff was cooperation and exchange of experience with the Parliament of Slovakia. In the period preceding

the opening of the negotiation process, cooperation with the Parliament of Greece was very significant, particularly in the light of the fact that the National Assembly was a beneficiary of a Twinning Project titled ‘Strengthening capacities of the National Assembly in the EU Integration Process’, where the Parliament of Greece provided us with a technical assistance. The Twinning Project lasted from January 2013 to the end of October 2014. The National Assembly staff made significant contribution to defining the project’s idea and in the implementation of the twinning project.

Strong interparliamentary bonds strengthen the political dialogue between EU candidate countries and EU member States and enhance the credibility of candidate country’s EU integration process. EU Member States’ parliaments may provide a significant support to candidate countries during their EU accession processes, both with regard to their governments and at the EU level. Cooperation between candidate countries’ parliaments and member states’ parliaments provides candidate countries with more flexibility in the political and legal alignment with the EU, by strengthening democratic institutions and promoting political and economic stability. This process benefits not only candidate countries, but also the EU itself, as it greatly contributes to building up a more stable and integrated European continent.

Thank you for your attention!