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President

Opening Address at the
Meeting of the Heads of the Supreme Audit Institutions of the Candidate and
Potential Candidate Countries and the European Court of Auditors

Skopje, 11-12 June 2007

In the event of any divergence of spoken text from the written text, the spoken text will prevail.
Mr Speaker of the Parliament, your Excellencies, dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is a very memorable day in the history of the cooperation of the Supreme Audit Institutions of Europe.

We meet in a historic place, Skopje, as Heads of the external Public Audit Institutions of the so-called Candidate and potential Candidate Countries of the European Union and the ECA. In so doing, we mark the successful completion of the latest enlargement of the EU, with 12 new Member States joining, which therefore means that our dear colleagues and friends from the SAIs of Bulgaria and Romania have become full Members of the EU SAIs' Contact Committee.

As a result, we are about to close an era of cooperation with the SAIs of those Member States that dates back to the protocol which was signed with the majority of those SAIs in 1998 in Warsaw, on the initiative of the Institution of which I have the honour to be President. Since then almost ten years have gone by and the track record of this cooperation, to which also the SAIs of the so-called "old" Member States and SIGMA have so much contributed, is impressive.

There is no doubt that through our intensive cooperation as SAIs in seminars, working groups, workshops, meetings of Liaison Officers and, last but not least, at our level as Heads of SAIs, we have made a tremendous contribution to the successful closure of Chapter 28 of the accession negotiation process, the chapter concerning Financial Control (which has now become 32).

Furthermore, it is in my view very clear that the result from our cooperation has enabled the SAIs in the then Candidate Countries to enhance their influence on the positive development of the systems of internal control of the administrations they audit. This influence has been exercised not only in relation to EU expenditure but also in particular on the quality of the management of public funds in general. Indeed, as it happens it was just a few days ago that a high-ranking representative from the Council personally confirmed to me that the audit reports on how EU funds are spent have not only resulted in better management of EU funds but also of national funds. These spin-off effects should not be underestimated and the national SAIs play a crucial role in this process. I see our work as an opportunity, a driving force for positive change and improvement of financial management.

Today is not only a memorable day, it is also a day of reflection, as the agenda of our meeting shows. It is important to benefit from experiences and lessons learned in the recent past. A key factor for our success in contributing to improvements, including in some cases desirable changes in the legal framework, is our relations with our Parliaments. In that context, I wish to remind you of the report that our colleagues, Auditor-General Galea and President Sekula, presented, even before accession, to the European Parliament. The latter's very favourable reaction to this report was the best illustration of its quality and its potential for further impact.

During the last meeting in Riga, three years ago, the importance of a number of future activities for our cooperation was underlined and action on them initiated.
Today we can reap the benefits of that.

I will just mention those on the agenda:

• as regards Twinning, a product is now on the table that represents a benchmark; I understand that INTOSAI will also make full use of it in its capacity-building efforts;
• as regards joint audit work, many concrete steps have been taken at working level and it is now time for us to take this further, with the help of all those involved, hopefully also including SIGMA.

I would like to conclude my opening remarks by underlining how important it is to continue on this road in future. As I have said, this road is without a doubt the right way forward. The enlargement process requires considerable efforts from all participants to make it a success. We as SAI s can play a very considerable role in facilitating this process - a process that is vital for the peaceful and prosperous future of European integration.

In that spirit it is most encouraging that we have here amongst us our colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina whom I warmly welcome.

Finally, I would like to thank you, Dr Arsovski, and your staff for all the effort and energy you have put into organising this meeting and making it such a remarkable and impressive event. It is only just over three years ago that your country, Dr Arsovski, asked for membership of the EU. With this in mind, I wish to thank you even more for welcoming us all here in Skopje.

Thank you for your attention.