

**Ladies and Gentlemen,
Guests and friends,**

It is a real pleasure to be here with you in Timisoara, in order to speak about the role played by NATO in South-eastern Europe, and about the reconstruction and stabilization process in the Balkans area.

The organization of an international seminar that deals with this topic just before the NATO Summit from Bucharest, and the choice of Timisoara as venue for our talks, bear a significant symbolic value.

Timisoara is the most important cultural and university centre of Romania laying in the immediate vicinity of the Western Balkans. Also, throughout history, Timisoara has been an example of multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Today, Timisoara represents a model of unity, free of religious or ethnic pre-conceived ideas.

The initiative to organise this seminar is also important from another point of view. The event is the 3rd and the last one in a series of debates organised at a similar level, that precedes the Bucharest Summit; all these seminars approach topics from the April Summit agenda.

Honoured guests,

The Bucharest Summit will be the biggest event ever hosted by Romania, as well as the biggest Summit in the history of the Alliance.

Just as the NATO Secretary General pointed out during his recent visit to Bucharest, on the 11th of January, we expect for Bucharest to properly lay down the „table” and the „plates” to be full of important decisions. In this context, we have reasons to believe that the Summit will occupy a significant position in the history of the Alliance.

As a host country, we are interested in organising a successful Summit, from a logistic point of view, which is a prerogative of Romania, as well as from a decision-making process perspective, which is the responsibility of all the members of the Alliance.

I can say that the Balkans will occupy a central position in the topics of discussion included on the Summit agenda in Bucharest.

We expect for three major issues connected to this space, to be among the results of the April event:

- The enlargement of the Alliance with the candidate states from the Western Balkans;
- Strengthening the relationships with the latest three NATO states admitted as part of the 2006 Peace Partnership;

- NATO operation in Kosovo (KFOR).

As you know, Romania supports the expansion of NATO towards all the three candidate countries (Croatia, Albania and Macedonia) as well as the three partners from the Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina) joining the Individual Action Plan for Partnership (IAPP) or the Intensified Dialogue (ID).

Romania is one of the countries participating in KFOR ever since the beginning of the operation, and we will continue to be present in Kosovo.

Even if we don't acknowledge the independence of Kosovo, this doesn't mean that we give up the responsibility undertaken to maintain security in the region.

KFOR can continue to play the role of liaison between Serbs and Albanians, together with fulfilling its role as security and stability factor in the region.

NATO's responsibility and capacity to preserve security in the region, and especially in Kosovo, has not been altered, although some important change of events occurred in this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have to admit that the Western Balkans represent a complex issue on the international agenda. It is therefore believed, especially in the academic environments, that the origins of the conflicts in the Balkans, the ethnic tensions, are a consequence of economic involutions and even of cynical manipulation practiced by the political elites.

I strongly believe that it's high time we contradicted the famous assertion of Winston Churchill, according to which the „Balkans have the tendency of producing more history than they can consume”. And the only way of contradicting this statement is the integration of the Balkan countries in NATO and the UE.

Whatever the reasons for violence in the past, it is high time that the states in the area looked forward to the future. Assessing the past in anger would only diminish the focus on current chances of having a better future.

Today, the Balkan countries are connected in one way or another, to the UE and NATO. And all these states are united by the same values, objectives and desires. If we walk on common grounds, we stand a chance of uniting our efforts in order to reach the objective of UE and NATO integration.

We all know that the Euro-Atlantic perspective represents the most effective motivation for the progress of the South-European countries. The experience of Romania confirms it.

After 4 years from joining NATO, we are proud that the Alliance has decided for Romania to host the 2008 Summit.

I believe that the choice of the Alliance in favour of Romania being the host of this event, was not a random one, but was justified by the prestige earned among the member states as a result of our contribution to the fulfilment of the NATO missions objectives.

Today, we rely on substantial cooperation mechanisms with the Balkan states. The projects and programmes, many of which refer to the process of democracy, human rights, social and economic issues, have also been supported and enhanced within the NATO partnerships.

Although NATO is first of all a political-military alliance, its contribution to the democracy of the Balkans can't be denied.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Together with other international bodies, NATO can play a significant role in the consolidation of security and the support of reforms in many areas, in the candidate and partner countries, from regions such as the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe or the Black Sea – Caucasian area.

Our perspective on NATO refers to an Alliance with a clear vision of the Balkans, an Alliance endowed with the capacity to face the risks and threats to our security, and which is interested in strengthening its partnerships with our neighbouring states or even farther countries, but which share our common goals.

Thank you for your attention.