

Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia at the Conference of Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, 15 April 2021

Esteemed President of the National Assembly,

Esteemed Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments,

Dear Guests,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you at the Conference of Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative hosted by the Slovenian National Assembly.

The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative is an important lever for strengthening regional cooperation. We are connected by a geographically bounded environment, which demands our common care and coordinated action.

The priorities of the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative meaningfully complement the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, which begins on 1 July, and adequately address the challenges we are facing.

The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative is also an important lever for strengthening the perspective of European integration for the Western Balkans countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the seventeenth Conference of Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, which reaffirms the importance of the parliamentary dimension of regional cooperation.

I welcome the decision that this Conference of Presidents/Speakers will address the situation of young people, as the COVID-19 epidemic has severely limited the opportunities for full participation in society particularly for the young.

The economic and social impact of the epidemic is putting young people in an even worse position; it reinforces a sense of hopelessness for many and it could accelerate emigration, which is already a major issue in most countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative.

I am positive that, by employing a carefully devised epidemic exit strategy, we can build a better future, which should be based on sustainable development, green technologies and accelerated digitalisation. Such a future would be sufficiently attractive to motivate young people to participate in economic, social and political life and thus contribute to the development of their local environment.

A suitable and carefully devised epidemic exit strategy would benefit all our societies and States.

Esteemed Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments, dear Conference participants, I wish you all a constructive discussion and every success in your work.