

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to greet you all on behalf of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia and in my own name. It is a great honour and privilege to be here with you today at the first Prime Ministers meeting of the enlarged CEFTA.

Indeed, it is a pleasure to witness that our initiative launched last year in Bucharest is to be completed tomorrow when CEFTA 2006 enters into force for all the member countries. This event clearly shows the willingness and readiness of the South-Eastern European countries to successfully undertake responsibility for the future of our region.

This year was important for all of us. We made efforts to finalize the process of ratification of this important Agreement and to set foundations for the strengthening of our political and economic cooperation. At this moment, it is our responsibility to ensure rapid and full implementation of CEFTA 2006 to facilitate the use of all the benefits it provides. I am confident that consistent application of CEFTA 2006 provisions will represent the best indicator of our endorsement of the responsibility for development of the South Eastern Europe.

Dear Colleagues,

Membership in CEFTA has always been a privilege. For more than a decade, the Agreement has bonded the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe together. Moreover, it has represented the 'spiritus movens' of their desire to join the European Union. The experiences of CEFTA membership of the Republic of Croatia and of other former member countries give us a reason for optimism. Their success in trade liberalization and achievement of the membership criteria of the European Union represents an impetus for the continuation of our efforts. I firmly believe that members of the enlarged CEFTA will successfully discover a way of how to keep this momentum going.

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is time to move from words to deeds, from elaboration of the provisions of this agreement to 'an era of its implementation'. We have met many difficult tasks and challenges that are behind us. **Now**, it is our job to devote ourselves to the achievement of the „era of implementation” in order to make CEFTA 2006 a success story.

Thank you for your attention.