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Thank you very much, Mr. President!

Unfortunately I don't have a text prepared in German language. My daughter would have been much more capable from this point of view. We stayed for a while here and she graduated in the school in Vienna, but in any case I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to address this distinguished meeting and I really welcome and I warmly thank you for the idea to address from the European perspective regional issues.

Well, I can tell you from the very beginning I have a quite short statement, only three hours, so I shall – with your permission – I shall put it aside maybe I shall not be very direct in my address and maybe not very politically correct but allow me to share with you some of our perspectives with regard to regional cooperation from an European Union perspective.

Really, I can tell you that we have been extremely happy and very, very grateful to our partner, colleague and friend, Michael Spindelegger, for the initiative and the idea to try jointly, Romania and Austria, Austria and Romania, to hammer out a regional solution with regard to the Danube.

Why the Danube is so important? Well, I am a big fan, a big advocate for the regional cooperation, of course the European and the Euratlantic projects, ideas and strategies are of utmost importance. Basically the European and Euratlantic integration changed my country and my citizens and my institutions, so I am very grateful, not only to the institutions but to the values, norms and standards, which are basically considered and expressed by these institutions. To think European and to act regionally, it becomes in my opinion something extremely important, we shall be exemtly dedicated, I am very grateful to government ... and to the distinguished representatives of the German and Austrian lands, to consider ... this idea for Danube cooperation.

Michael told you about the political roots and how we were trying to support it to advocate this initiative in front of the European Union Commissioner. I can tell you that due to our efforts practically all the riparian States to the Danube are now considering at least from the political point of view that this idea should have political final during this mandate of the European Union's presidency and we hope that as of 2010 when Hungary will take the presidency of the European Union we shall have pragmatic projects, technical ideas in order to move this strategy.

Well, why it is important? Let's look a little bit to the map. From the economic point of view practically through Danube now we are connecting the central

part of Europe to the Black Sea. There is a huge expectation coming from the businessmen, from the common citizens, from different kind of governmental or non-governmental institutions irrespective from what country to see that the Danube really becomes a channel of economic, strategic and cultural communication.

Now, practically we are trying to figure out projects which ... one aspect are coming in the idea to fulfill the expectations of some European Union states with different levels of economy development, some non-European Union states with different types of aspiration and some states or governments which for the time being even did not want to become European Union states.

We should look positive to the whole situation, we should consider that an economic project which might connect through the Danube, Germany, Austria, Serbia and to the Black Sea through Romania and Bulgaria, should really and might be considered as a very good economic instrument.

Yes, we have good political projects. Eastern partnership was nominated by our friend and colleague, Karel Schwarzenberg, and I think that this general political project should benefit for those who are practically not into the door of European Union. I can tell you that we Romania, even if we were not from the very beginning between the initiators of this project, we shall try to support it as much as possible and I am very grateful for your idea and for dedication in this regard.

Why also from the economic but also from the strategic point of view this Danube-initiative should be a benefit for all of us? Of course, everyone is interested in the idea to address the big challenges of nowadays, the economic challenges coming from the economic or financial crises, asymmetrical threads. Aspects which in our opinion should be dealt with in a much more appropriate way they can take into account the regional cooperation, even if we are speaking about illegal migration or traffic in human beings, or even economic development, I think that the European general approach for security and stability should be addressed better, if you are looking to it from the regional point of view.

Also, if you are speaking about intercultural relation don't neglect this aspect. I was extremel grateful to you, Madame, because you were saying, look the paintings and the poetry should not need any translation. Yes, all of the countries along the Danube practically they have a huge and very significant culture or heritage. This culture or heritage should be at least acknowledged and after that should be considered accordingly, and I think that this is the main instrument to bring our citizens as close as possible and together as close as possible to the standards and values.

I am speaking about standards and values, because from time to time I don't see quite a big European Union support in order to keep both eyes closed with regard to these standards. They should not be forgotten. You can also be sure that beyond the political address and the political attitude of some governments after the political decision were taken still it is a long process coming afterwards, in order to change not only institutions but to change the mentality and the culture of, how do you want to say, the newcomers, the traditional founding fathers or those who have, who are now just in the spirit of incoming to European Union.

So, from this point of view, the Danube could be a good linkage. Someone was saying about the Black Sea. Well, we discuss a lot about the Black Sea, but also everyone is asking a little bit further from the geographical point of view, what you can do to the Eastern neighbourhood, vicinity of the European Union in order to first of all respect the norms, standards or functioning of a state, on the other hand to fulfill the expectations of those people. I am not speaking about governments here, I speak about people, practically what they need from us. They need three movements. They need three movements on the basic elements of the European Union, the services, goods, and citizens, they need common areas of economic changes, they need the opportunity to have a better life.

Around the Black Sea there are 350 million citizens looking exactly to the health and good life for themselves and their families. They are loving at the same level, what is good and what is considered to be important for every and each life. So for them a political decision which really takes into account mostly the performance of the government than the expectations of the people, more or less is to reject. Of course, from the institutional building point of view, from the rule of law, principles of functioning there are benefits, but also they are quite rigid and quite difficult to understand addresses coming from European, yes, a government, European Union, should be known better, should be known better taking into account the values they are promoting not only the decisions which are considered politically from time to time.

Maybe, from the political point of view, from the strategic point of view, is difficult to offer the membership to everyone without or neglecting the values. On the other hand the citizens should feel that the European Union has also some other assets which might be considered jointly with them. And the Danube, through the Danube river we can bring projects for an environmental protection. By the way how important in my view some good and solid projects for environmental protection coming from the central of Europe going through the Danube to the Black Sea. In the synergy of the Black Sea another project of European Union, Romania has the area of environmental protection. Okay, let's figure out some solutions which might connect at least from this point of view and might attract the interest of the public opinion in this regard.

Everyone is fashionable now to speak about the climate change. It is also important from the economic point of view, but anyone can consider that this important area of climate change was presented and people in our countries learned about it from the substantive perspective, how many politicians are ready to cope with their candidature for the European Parliament promoting in their constituency that European perspective or Euratlantic perspective for the climate change. At least in my country is a little bit amusing.

Unfortunately something extremely valuable for the time being was not very clearly presented and underscored to the people, to the citizens, and we are addressing everything at the end of the day to our citizens, our European citizens, and also it is important to see how another field like energy security should be addressed through regional projects. I can give you an example. At the very beginning of this year, when the energy crises was starting, there where some countries which practically were connected 100 % from the gaz coming from outside, 100 %!, Bulgaria, Slovak Republic. Fortunately my country only 32 % of our gaz we are taking from outside. In that moment it came up naturally the idea to support each other, at least European Union states and we figured out, in Romania, that it was was quite difficult to support Bulgaria, why? Because it didn't have the pipeline. Nobody from the regional point of view took the initiative to look a little bit around in the yard and to see that in some cases we didn't have the pipeline. We had the gaz, in Bulgaria they need it of utmost urgency this gaz, we didn't have the pipeline. So a very small ... a few million of Euros. So, that is why we are really also trying to learn from the mistakes of the past. It is important to see how things should be developped from the regional point of view. We have regions in my country with different levels of economic development, also through Danube maybe we shall connect, we should connect regions with different types of religion believes. Don't forget that, from the historic point of view, this value maybe was not addressed quite in a substantive way due to different kind of so big and so much political statements.

Having good projects that maybe will generate decrease in the frustrational, let's say, Serbia, with regard European Union approach. When we are going to build bridges, not only political bridges, but also concrete bridges, when we are going to bring the infra-structure projects as close as possible to the citizens, when we are bringing values, jurists, people who really understand the needs of a community, things should be understood much more easy, at least how I see the situation.

So, I think that this initiative beyond its political capabilities, political benefits, really should prove, might prove in the near future, I hope in the near future, to be one of the best solutions for security and stability in Central and South East Europe. We can try to figure out how the signature of the Black Sea should be connected with the Danube strategy. Okay, from the very beginning, from the political point of view or diplomatic point of view, this is

what we can do. We can only open doors, but really this door is open to a good direction, because we have been confronted in the last years with a lot of doors which had been opened only to the sky.

We are very seriously engaged in this Danube initiative, maybe we are too optimistic, maybe we saw only benefits, maybe there are some negative situations with regard to this, please present them to us, and we are ready to discuss or to address them.

One final comment: Well, you know Romania practically has the second, yes, the second longest border after Finland to the European Union, meaning a lot of opportunities but also meaning a lot of challenges. Also, in terms of billions of Euros, Romania since 2007 is a contributor to the European Union with money, with funds, not as much as you or other countries, but really taking into account our capabilities it is something quite significant. From the economic point of view we are in a quite stable movement now, of course, we are confronting some challenges, some problems from the economic point of view, mostly those of our deficit, but I don't think that someone should be very nervous from this point of view, the perspective of our economy, the perspective for recovering of our economy should be quite a good one in the future, but I can tell you that at least when we are looking to some of different types of regional cooperation, we are very interested to see not only that we are the seventh country in the European Union in terms of contribution, but also that we are the country, which really should – through cooperation and dialogue – hammer out solutions, strategies to the Eastern and South-East part of Europe.

Practically, we are together in the same region with countries who are confronted now with very, very serious political economic problems. And we are looking very intensively to the developments in these countries, and what I kindly ask you is that to stay together when we are looking to this situation. I don't think that something which hopefully will not happen, but if we shall be confronted with coming from the East, first of all, we effect a buffer-zone and afterwards will effect the others. I think, like it happened at the crises in energy, and the security in energy will effect all of us suddenly, and that is why again I am very happy and I should like again to express my gratitude to my Austrian colleague for the idea to understand as early as possible that the development of a regional strategy should be for the benefit, not only of us, the politicians, but also for the citizens and also for the better prospects of our European Union family.

I thank you very much. I am very grateful again for your attention.