

*Dear Colleagues,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*It is my great honour and privilege to be here with you today at this year's Joint Committee Meeting. This event clearly shows the willingness and readiness of the South-Eastern European countries to successfully undertake responsibility for the future of our region.*

*Dear Colleagues,*

*I would like to express my satisfaction with continuous positive growth trends of our mutual trade.*

*The total foreign trade between the Republic of Croatia and CEFTA countries in 2007 amounted almost 3 billion EUR which is a share of 10,6% in the total foreign trade of the Republic of Croatia becoming thus after the EU our second largest trade partner.*

*In 2007 exports amounted to 2 billion EUR which is by 27% higher than in 2006 while 950 million EUR worth of goods was imported which is a 15% growth compared with 2006.*

*In the first six months of 2008, Croatia has exported 1.07 billion EUR to CEFTA countries, which is by 20% higher than in the same period in 2007, while imports amounted to 500 million EUR which presents a growth of 9.4%.*

*Therefore, the total foreign trade between Croatia and CEFTA countries amounted to 1.6 billion EUR for the first six months of 2008.*

*Additionally, the total Foreign Direct Investments Croatia has put into CEFTA countries from 1993 till 2007 amounted to 789 million EUR.*

*Dear Colleagues,*

*Membership in CEFTA has always been a privilege and an open window of opportunities. We, the representatives of our Governments, have made an excellent framework for doing business. I am confident that the representatives of the business community will discover ways on how to use the benefits the Agreement provides.*

*Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*The Republic of Croatia supports initiatives for the abolition and modification of trade concessions within CEFTA 2006 and is ready for discussion on solutions that would simplify and accelerate the whole process.*

*I would like to thank the subcommittees for the efforts invested so far in the successful work they have done this year.*

*It is of great importance for all CEFTA member countries to continue to act according to the WTO rules with the goal to bring the national trade policies to the global standards and accordingly to the European Union.*

*I would also like to wish the recently established CEFTA Secretariat all the success in the upcoming endeavours and in fulfilling its duties according to the Mandate of the Secretariat adopted by CEFTA Parties.*

*According to the available data on the international trade, the implementation of the CEFTA 2006 Agreement has clearly improved our macroeconomic results and has created an environment suitable for further economic development of our countries and the overall positive relations between CEFTA Parties.*

*I wish us all a pleasant and efficient meeting.*

*Thank you for your attention.*