

Opening remarks
Meeting of Heads of Governments of China and
Central and Eastern European Countries
Dubrovnik, Croatia 12 April 2019

Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia
H.E. Andrej Plenković

Dear Premier Li,

Distinguished Prime Ministers of the CEEC,

Honorable Ministers, Observers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Let me welcome you in Dubrovnik as we open the **eight Meeting of the Heads of Governments** of China and Central and Eastern European Countries.
- We meet once a year to **reflect upon deliverables** of 16+1 Cooperation and to set new and ambitious goals for future cooperation between our countries.
- There is growing interest in 16+1 Cooperation which only proves that this cooperation is **active, productive and results oriented.**

- There is a **number of countries interested in** getting observer status, and also **becoming full members**.
- Croatia believes the 16+1 Cooperation should be **open and inclusive**, and in this regard we are glad that here in Dubrovnik we will be welcoming **Greece** to join us and to become the full member of the 16+1 family or – should I say – of the **17+1 family**.
- Since its inauguration, our Cooperation has grown into an **inseparable part of our bilateral cooperation with China** and a valuable contribution to overall Europe–China and EU–China relations.
- The significance and scope of the 16+1 format is growing in all fields of cooperation and the Government of **Croatia fully supports** it generating even more **results-oriented projects**.
- I think we can all agree that **China's economic weight and growth** is very important in helping the forward momentum of the global economy.

- All of us around this table are looking at **new modalities** of how to better **integrate the economies** of the two sides and generate more job opportunities.
- Although the numbers can always be better, all in all we must acknowledge that in quite short time since 2012, the 16+1 Cooperation has **formed new ties** and generated concrete results.
- Croatia believes that the EU, the CEEC countries, China and the whole of Asia could benefit from **more infrastructure links** between China and us.
- For this reason Croatia supports more intensive dialogue on the **EU–China Connectivity Platform**.
- We encourage all countries of the 16+1 Cooperation to work on **expanding connectivity routes** between China and Central and Eastern Europe.
- Connectivity will **strengthen ties** between businesses, increase trade and tourism as well as people-to-people contacts.

- In this regard I am pleased to announce that Croatia will be the host of the **Fifth China–CEEC Transport Ministers' Meeting in 2020**.
- We cannot talk about connectivity and infrastructure without mentioning the symbol of Croatian and Chinese cooperation: **the Pelješac Bridge**.
- The Chinese company **China Road and Bridge Corporation** won the international tender for the construction of this vitally important infrastructure project in Croatia.
- This bridge is crucial for **physically connecting Croatia** along its southern part but it is also important to note that this project is being **financed by EU funds** in line with EU standards and regulations.
- We are indeed **building a new bridge** through **openness, innovation and partnership**, echoing the theme of our Summit this year.
- **Tourism** is another branch of industry of growing importance in our relationship with China.

- In 2018 we welcomed a **quarter of a million Chinese tourists** and in 2019 the positive growth of Chinese arrivals is continuing.
- As it was shared in Dubrovnik last year, when our ministers of tourism met, there are **already 1.7 million visits** between the Central and Eastern European countries and China.
- Thus, our **people-to-people links** are truly growing stronger.
- In addition, I am pleased that Croatia is the lead of the **16+1 Coordination mechanism for small and medium size enterprises**: we just launched its **website** at the Business forum.
- The **SME Coordination mechanism** will serve as a useful new platform for 16+1 SME's with the aim of increasing the output of our SME's in the overall **trade volume between our countries and China**.

- I am pleased that **attendance of the Business forum** was **exemplary**, and we regret that we could not accept all the interested companies who wanted to attend.
- That clearly shows that our companies, including our SME's, are **continuously seeking ways** of how to offer more goods and services on the Chinese market.
- According to the latest data, trade between the Central and Eastern European countries and China **increased by 21% on year and reached 82 billion US dollars in 2018.**
- China invested **10 billion US dollars** and received **1.5 billion US dollars.**
- With this, dear Colleagues, once again I would like to **thank you for coming** to Croatia and **for attending** the Dubrovnik 16+1 Summit.
- Let's join efforts into making this **great mechanism even more successful.**