30 September 2016

**OPENING SESSION**

**Address by Ms. Renata DESKOSKA, Vice-President of the Assembly**

**of the Republic of Macedonia and Head of the Delegation**

**to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

Madam President of the OSCE PA,

Distinguished colleagues parliamentarians,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to welcome you here in the Republic of Macedonia on the occasion of the Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly 2016. This is the first OSCE PA event organized by the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, but also the biggest international political event ever organized in our country. I am particularly pleased that this session marks three important jubilees: 25 years of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 15 years since the first Autumn Meeting of this Assembly, but also 25 years since the independence of the Republic of Macedonia.

Over the 25 years of its existence, OSCE PA has proven its crucial and indispensable role in providing a forum for dialogue among the parliamentarians from Europe, Asia and North America, leading election observation missions and strengthening international parliamentary cooperation on political, security, economic, environmental and human rights issues.

Still, after 25 years since its establishment, OSCE PA faces serious challenges in the implementation of its values, such as peace, security, human rights, democracy, rule of law and economic development.

In the beginning of the 21th century, the security challenges, the threat of terrorism and economic crisis revealed undemocratic tendencies in some countries that were considered democratic.

The refugee crisis confronted us with fear. And the fear is the basic motivator of undemocratic ideas, radical and extreme political movements that can endanger basic values of OSCE.

In the name of national interests, many European countries responded to refugee crisis by forgetting the European solidarity. However, OSCE has played and should continue to play a major role in reaffirming the common values, such as human rights and rule of law.

Therefore, in this occasion I would like to stress that the concern for regional security should not be to the detriment of the concern for the quality of democracy and the respect for human rights in the OSCE member states.

Human rights are the essential part of what the OSCE is today, and are referred to as its ‘human dimension’.

Unfortunately, today, the human rights and especially freedom of expression, free media and free elections are endangered in certain OSCE countries.

In the era when the idea of democracy triumphed and is undesputed on the international scene, regimes that seems democratic, displayed many authoritarian features.

We must admit that democratic institutions in part of the OSCE region are weakened. An optimisic conclusion would be that democracy is in stagnation. It would be more realistic to say that the democacy is declining.

The violation of the principles of free and fair elections and human rights, undermines the pillars of democracy and rule of law.

The clientelism and corruption, as well as unaccountable democratic institutions lead to massive dissatisfation of the citizens.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE PA should openly and courageously discuss the challenges we face today.

In a period when the Republic of Macedonia is facing a serious political, legal and institutional crisis, hosting the Autumn Session of the OSCE PA is of exceptional importance, as a motivation to return on the right path, path of respect of human rights, free and fair elections and recovery of democratic principles of governance.

I would also like to recognise the important work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and ODIHR in their support for holding free elections and we expect them to have an active role in the upcoming early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Macedonia, scheduled for December 11, this year.

I sincerely hope, that the topic of this Parliamentary Conference will provide sufficient frame for fruitful discussion on these challenges.

At the end, on behalf of the Delegation of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia to the OSCE PA, I would like to thank you for accepting our invitation for the Autumn Meeting 2016 and to wish you a very productive and pleasant stay in our beautiful country.

Thank you for your attention.