**Mr Chairman,**

**Ministers, Excellences, Generals,**

**Esteemed representatives of international organisations,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First of all I would like to thank the hosts for organising this extremely important meeting and to thank to Her Excellency Roberta Pinotti for the hospitality extended. Symbolic of this meeting is higher due to fact we held it in this historic city. That symbolic I see in one Latin proverb, which is saying “*Tutte le strade portano a Roma”*, or “*all roads lead to Rome*”.

Please allow me also to congratulate the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Turkey for its current chairing over SEDM and to express my satisfaction with the hard work conducted so far.

Today, we celebrate 20 years of existence of SEDM and anniversary of successful cooperation. However, this is the year when international community faces serious challenges, such as the current **refugee-migrant crisis.** The scale of this serious crisis Europe is faced with, including the Republic of Serbia, is huge. Supported by the fact that in the previous year and a half, over **seven** **hundred thousand (700,000)** refugees and migrants passed through Serbia.

The Republic of Serbia is on one of the key migrant routes, the so-called Balkan Route. This fact has activated all the levels of the society in my country to show solidarity and humanity. Our solidarity and humanity for refugees and migrants, and true understanding of their position stems from the fact that we have been dealing with the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons for over two decades now. Today, in my country there are a total of two hundred fifty thousand (**250,000)** refugees and internally displaced persons in a long-lasting displacement from former Yugoslavia, which represents the largest number in Europe.

Another difficulty Serbia is facing with is a high number of illegal migrations, and risk of the crisis escalation and **the infiltration of extremists and terrorists** in the migratory flows. Therefore, a security measures has been activated by the **joint engagement** of the forces of the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Interior **on securing the state border**. The members of the Ministry of Interior are also engaged in certain countries of the region.

As you already know, the Republic of Serbia recognises the “Islamic State” as a threat to security, and it is the member of the Global coalition against the “Islamic State”. In this context, for the Republic of Serbia it is particularly important to resolve the current problem of the recruitment and engagement of radical Islamists from the region of the Western Balkans in the areas struck by armed conflicts in Syria, whose number according to some assessments amounts to **over seven hundred (700) individuals**.

In the matter of regional security and stability, we have to consider the very causes of the conflicts, and the interconnection between economic stability and peace. For my country and the Western Balkans region there is no doubt that the EU enlargement policy represents one of the key **catalysts for social and economic growth and progress.** In this respect, a more serious slowdown in the EU enlargement would have negative consequences for the economic growth, and indirectly for political stability of the region.

On the other hand, we are aware of all the challenges that the EU faces, and we believe that, in proportion to our capabilities, we can contribute, as partners and future EU members. More precisely, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia by its active role in the EU crisis operations and its participation in the peacekeeping missions led by the UN gives its significant contribution in this respect.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At this important moment, when Europe need more significant investment of efforts of all states for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security, the Republic of Serbia **remains committed to the improving cooperation** with key international organisations in the field of defence and security and to **providing an active contribution** in the framework of regional forums in the area of South East Europe.

Regular political dialogue, based on transparency, long-term cooperation and joint and synchronised actions, and a permanent exchange of information on contemporary security challenges which affect not only the region but also the wider international community, represent a good framework for finding a response to the challenges that none of us can respond alone. Only if we cooperate, we will succeed in overcoming current refugee crisis and fight against terrorism and I believe victory is our common goal. As Kemal [Atatürk](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2793859.Mustafa_Kemal_Atat_rk) said, “Victory is for those who can say "Victory is mine". Success is for those who can begin saying "I will succeed" and say "I have succeeded" in the end.”

Thank you for your attention.