

Hon. Osman Metalla, MP (Dem.)

Mrs. Speaker,

Honourable Colleagues,

In the debate of today I would like to bring to the attention of the citizens and MY colleagues the decision of the government which was taken in the last gathering of the Cabinet related to the concession approval in favour of the Zumax AG COMPANY for the construction of a port of containers in the Gulf of Vlora, near the caustic soda Forest.

I do consider this decision as the most important one taken by the government on port development in Albania, particularly in view of the fact that this port is of an extraordinary importance for the Albanian economy. The construction of this port has the potential to transform Vlora into the principle maritime centre of Albania and simultaneously the most important node for the movement of goods from Far East and the USA to the Balkans and Europe.

What has always been said throughout the centuries concerning the good strategic position of the Gulf of Vlora, now is being proved thanks to the positive interest of the Anglo-Swiss company Zumax AG. The company, after examining various options for the construction of a LARGE container port in Libya, Turkey and other alternatives, came to the conclusion that Vlora is most suitably placed to implement such a big and important project for business in Albania. The Association-Stabilization Agreement, the NATO membership and other integrating processes have made Albania a most preferred place for the foreign investors who, despite the fact that the global economy is facing maybe the harshest economic crisis since WWII, have not reduced their interest for investments in Albania. This softens the impact of this crisis in our country. Today Albania is seen as a safe place for many strategic investors inasmuch as it provides guarantees based on the economic, social and political stability, and, last but not least, security. There is no doubt that these factors have made Albania a target for the investors.

The construction of such a port would turn Vlora into the biggest centre for the handling of containers in the Mediterranean or, as an Italian tabloid wrote recently, it would turn Vlora into the Dubai of the Mediterranean.

This port would allow the Gulf of Vlora be one of the biggest generators of income for the Albanian economy and, more importantly, the biggest generator of employment for Vlora. Both the port and the free economic zone that will be built near will employ more than 90.000 people. Moreover, the construction of such a port is not a threat to the development of other industries such as tourism.

This port, due to its adjacency to the sea-lane from the Suez Canal to Gibraltar or the other sea-lane from the Sicily Channel to the Black Sea through the Dardanelles and due to its position at the entrance of the to the Adriatic Sea, has everything needed to make it a giant transshipment hub of cargos from all over the globe to the Mediterranean and Europe. Furthermore, the sailing capacity that the Gulf of Vlora has, allowing the anchorage of big draft ships and the handling capacity of the port predicting the elaboration of 3.000.000 TEU annually, will make this port very competitive in the regional market and beyond.

The decision of the Government comes at a time when the road infrastructure in the country has seen dramatic improvement. Here, I mean the nearly completed four-lane motorway from Rrogozhina to Fier, while work in the Fier-Vlora section is in progress, which will complete the Trans-Balkan road to Vlora and link the latter with Corridor VIII. In addition to this, the "Road of the Century," Durrës-Kukës, when it opens for traffic in June this year, is another possibility for the distribution of cargo that will come to the Port of Vlora and the extension of the services of this port through to Kosovo and beyond, by joining this port with the Corridor X in Nis.

The decision to give this concession to the Zumax AG deserves praise, especially when we see it from the context of the geostrategic importance. After Durrës – Kukës Road and

Corridor VIII, this project is closely linked to them and stands among them. The success of this project depends entirely on speed in making the decisions and acting quickly on them.

For this reason, the success of this project very much depends on the political support we should give to it. I invite my colleagues to give the deserved political support to this project, in view of its sheer scale and the geostrategic importance for the economy, stability and national security.

I am convinced that this project has already found and will find the continued support of many MP colleagues. I think that the wide political support of this project is an essential factor for its early implementation.

Thank you.