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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the first time in the long, intertwined history of our two nations that a Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs has had the opportunity to give a public address in the Turkish Republic.

It is my immense pleasure to join you here today, in the remarkable city of Istanbul.

Aside from the myriad other things Istanbul represents, it is an often-forgotten symbol of shared Serbian-Turkish history. For the Serbs, Istanbul is a place where some of our nation's forefathers were re-settled by Suleiman the Magnificent, in the autumn of 1521. Thousands were sent to live in what is now known as the Belgrade Forest. There they were put in charge of the intricate water supply system that fed into the city, ensuring for hundreds of years that Istanbul never went dry.

In the same year, thousands more Serbs—mostly stone masons and other highly-skilled builders—came to live near the Belgrade Gate. For centuries, they and their descendants helped build some of this city's greatest masterpieces of Ottoman architecture, including the Suleymaniye Mosque. Amongst the hundreds of buildings they constructed in Istanbul, I will single out another one: the stunningly beautiful Sokollu Mehmed Pasha Mosque. Both were designed by the unrivaled court architect Sinan, and the latter was an endowment of one of our most famous sons, Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolović.

He stands in the annals of history amongst the most distinguished of all Ottoman politicians. Combining his Serbian upbringing and his peculiar sense of Ottoman identity, Sokolović's

integrity, his prudential judgment, and his tactical genius, encouraged all communities he came into contact with to look to the future with optimism.

Now, to affirm that Istanbul is a place of the shared or intertwined history of many nations is not to deny that it is today of course a *Turkish* metropolis. What makes it so great, however, is the seamless blending of so many aspects of the past, such a dynamic present, and an incredible enthusiasm for the future.

That is why, in my mind, Istanbul is in a sense an idea—an evolving, changing idea that man has about himself and his place in the world. One could almost say that Istanbul serves as an integral part of the very definition of civilization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our historical ties, however, are not the only reason I am pleased to be on an official visit here as Foreign Minister of Serbia.

I am also here because Turkey is a crucial actor on the international stage. What Mustafa Kemal Atatürk built so many decades ago has matured over time into a singular, vibrant, and democratic whole.

“Where there is activity, there is fertility”—so says an old Turkish proverb. And while this geography has served as the cradle and grave of countless civilizations, producing over time a unique marvel of diversity, the Turkish nation has remained: for many hundreds of years, you have watered its bountiful soil, built epic monuments over its land, and transformed it into a dynamic country that is both admired and, unfortunately, sometimes misunderstood.

One could ask: what is the source of this ambiguous perception by others—a perception that has formed an unmistakable part of your national identity in the eighty or so years since the founding of modern-day Turkey?

In the broadest possible sense, I believe that it is because much of what is commonly termed ‘the East’ sees you as part of ‘the West,’ while there are those in the West who see you as the East. And now, reformulating your own national understanding of the great founding legacy of your Republic, the Turkish nation of *this* century has come to the proud conclusion that you belong to both.

What may be less familiar to you is that many of *our own* writers and statesmen have made similar arguments about the Serbian nation’s sense of belonging—and I believe there is something to it. Consider what the catalyst of our democratic revolution, the assassinated Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić, said in June 2001: “We are a very active nation, individualistic, curious and very complicated. These are all Western traits. We are not however merely a European nation; we have elements of both the East and the West.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with all this in mind that I want to touch upon one of the most important geopolitical issues before us today: the future role of Europe in the international arena.

The question can be put in the following way: will the EU choose to play a key role on the world stage?

I believe that the answer can largely be provided by an examination of one aspect of the strategic options before the European Union. This concerns the EU’s relationships with the belt of nations currently to its east and south-east—in particular, on two pivot countries in the greater

European space: Turkey and Serbia.

How the EU chooses to engage with Turkey will almost certainly transform the scope of its ability to project strategic influence in Eurasia and the Greater Middle East. And the decision about whether Europe will rapidly extend membership to Serbia will definitively affect the future of the entire Western Balkans, which I believe is a vital element of the consolidation of European security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I turn first to Turkey. Geo-strategically, your country is uniquely important. It serves as the extension of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. It also stands at the center of Eurasia and continues to act as a heralded overland transportation and trade hub within that space. In addition, your country has important cultural links with the Caucasus, the Caspian basin, and Central Asia, going as far as western China. Moreover, Turkey is surrounded by three crucial seas: the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean—as it straddles both sides of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.

Let me say two more things. First, Turkey has maintained healthy relationships with every single country in the Greater Middle East; it remains one of the most important regional water suppliers; and its role as a major energy supply route to Europe cannot be over-stated.

Second, Turkey has been successfully blending two of the most important contemporary civilizations of our world: Islam and the West. Undertaking the peaceful consolidation of this blending beyond Turkey’s borders is of paramount importance to the future direction of our region, and of world events.

In short, the depth of Turkey’s geopolitical importance is incontestable. And I believe that in the decades to come, Turkey may become the EU’s strategic capacity multiplier for influence in the Greater Middle East.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To make it as clear as possible, I want to turn for a moment to the EU’s emergence from the ashes of the Second World War, and to how it assumed the role of *reconciler of European nations*.

Since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the institutions of the European Union have acted as a democratic binding agent, defeating the deep divisions that had plagued the continent for more than a millennia.

Reconciling the major European nations characterized the noble endeavor of the EU in the second half of the 20th century.

But there is a larger, even more daunting task that awaits not just the EU-27 in the 21st century, but greater Europe. We must work with one another on a project of fundamental importance. We must become the world's leading
reconciler of faiths

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I see two main components to the fulfillment of this task.

The first concerns Europe’s relations with its own growing and increasingly diverse Muslim community, many of whom are Turkish.

The European Union should increase its efforts to truly integrate—and by this I do not mean assimilate—the millions of Muslims that live inside the EU’s borders.

The resulting positive change in the European social fabric—the blending of which I spoke earlier—will produce the conditions for tackling more successfully the second component of our joint task of reconciling the faiths: unreservedly engaging the Muslim world *outside* Europe, especially in its greater Middle East heartland.

An inescapable part of the solution is Turkey. There is no doubt about that. The issue is whether the European Union will be as well. Should it engage with Turkey in a way that leads to membership, then the EU would find itself in a position to play a defining role in the

transformation of the Greater Middle East—the ultimate theatre of significance in the 21st century.

My basic point is that only a Europe fully engaged with Turkey can stand at the vanguard of forging a compact of long-term peace, security and prosperity in this region of great consequence. The reason is simple. Only by working together can the necessary credibility to see the civilizational engagement through to a successful conclusion be created.

In short, truly taking seriously the pivotal role Turkey can play is the only way the EU can transform itself from being perceived as a partisan actor in the drama, to an honest broker in the Greater Middle East.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The other pivotal country I want to discuss is my own. I do not aspire to put Serbia in the same category of significance as Turkey. But I would like to make the case for a similar level of importance for our respective theatres—at least from the strategic perspective of the European Union.

Let me begin by saying that European integration is the only lasting guarantee of peace and stability in the Western Balkans. It is the only way we can make sure that European values can be consolidated, European reforms completed, and European standards actualized.

Now, Serbia is the region's indispensable geo-strategic anchor, uniquely placed to act as the accession accelerator for the Western Balkans.

Serbia has made it clear that rapidly achieving EU membership is our central strategic priority. So have all the other countries in the region.

What has to be emphasized with greater clarity, however—especially in the context of the financial crisis that has affected us all—is that Europe mustn't contemplate an exit strategy when it comes to our part of the world. Should it begin to hedge its bets on enlargement in the Western Balkans, more resources would end up being devoted to managing occasional flare-ups and gathering crises, than those that will have to be spent on completing the integration process. Hands-on engagement—particularly with Serbia—is the only way forward.

Simply put, the EU will be safer if the Western Balkans, with Serbia at its center, enters the House of Europe, instead of remaining bitterly at its gates.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The way I see it, making sure that the countries of the Western Balkans become members of the European Union is also in the interest of Turkey. Firstly, because the region serves as a permanent connection point between Central Europe and its south-east. And secondly, because Europe's strategic engagement with Turkey in the Greater Middle East is in many ways related to a secure and integrated Western Balkans.

Serbia will remain integral to solutions regarding the region's outstanding challenges. I think Turkey can play an enhanced role in helping to shape outcomes that are acceptable to all involved. To do so, Ankara needs a strong partner in the Western Balkans.

Leaders are the shapers of the future. Nations such as ours have continuously felt the pull of the future coming right at us. And they have faced it squarely, responsibly, ready to harness it for the good of their people and that of others. As President Boris Tadić of Serbia has said,

statesmanship is the blending of passion, reason and courage. That is why I believe it is in the common interest of both our countries to work *together*, as two regional pivots, to address unresolved issues in the Western Balkans, such as the process of reform in Bosnia and the status of Kosovo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On February 17th, 2008, the ethnic-Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia—in direct violation of the basic tenets and principles of international law.

Serbia’s red lines on Priština’s unilateral declaration of independence—or UDI—are clear, and they will continue to be honored without exception. It is both a vital national interest and a constitutional imperative to peacefully defend our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thanks to our carefully measured response to UDI recognitions, the political fallout with countries that did unfortunately recognize UDI, such as Turkey, was largely contained. As a result, our bilateral relations have not suffered substantially.

I think it is also important to underline the strategic implications of UDI. It has called into question the very nature of the international system, setting a ready-made precedent that any number of ethnic minorities with a grievance against their capitals could use.

Now, we have heard the argument that Kosovo's UDI is *sui generis*—a unique case. But the truth is, this comes down to saying that Kosovo is an exception to international law—that Kosovo should stand beyond the rules that govern the behavior of the international community.

I don't believe that anyone should permit himself the right to declare such exceptions. Consider the consequences should a group of countries somewhere else in the world proclaim another exception to international law, in the name of supporting somebody else's separatism.

That's why Serbia's position has remained consistent: the only way to avoid illegitimately challenging the territorial integrity of *any* UN member State, is for the world community to work constructively together to solve this issue through international institutions of indisputable and universal legitimacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe both our countries stand to benefit from working together as partners in the Western Balkans.

We would reinforce each other's strategic influence in the region, as well as demonstrate our ability to overcome bilateral differences in a way that would advance our broader interests. As a result, Serbia and Turkey would come to be appreciated as both stable providers and multipliers of security in the Western Balkans.

What I propose, Ladies and Gentlemen, will not be easy. Our disagreement about UDI has complicated matters significantly. But I think that ways could be found to overcome the present state of affairs, perhaps after the International Court of Justice issues its advisory opinion on the legality of UDI.

In the meantime, Belgrade and Ankara should start laying the groundwork to cease working at cross-purposes in the Western Balkans.

To succeed, we need to do some recalibrating. We need to begin seeing each other in terms of a cooperative relationship we can forge. And we need to focus on the advantages that can arise from combining our two respective potentials.

This will require a shared vision, the courage of leadership, and strategic foresight. But I believe both our countries are more than capable of seizing the moment on offer, and making the right decision. Most importantly, I believe we are strong and confident enough to concentrate on the fundamental benefits that would result from a Turkish commitment to engage in the Western Balkans, through a strategic partnership with Serbia.

Thank you very much for your attention.