



Distinguished participants, experts,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like, first of all, to thank the organizer and express my expectation that we will have, today, a fruitful quality discussion on an important current topic of interest to Serbia, the region and Europe, as well.

In the years of economic crisis and political instability, we have learned a great deal about ourselves, our countries and our mutual relations. Faced with a new political and economic map of the world where the flow of economic power running towards the East continues unabated, the European countries have found themselves in a situation that apparently calls for redefinition of the environment and mechanisms on whose foundations we are building stability and security, ensuring economic growth and prosperity of our citizens. Since World War II, the peoples of Europe have never been more aware of the interdependence of their economies and their overall relations.

The gravity of the economic and financial crisis within the European Union and the social changes visible in a certain number of the EU Member States will definitely have a bearing on the attitude of the EU and its priorities over a longer period. There is no doubt that the general priorities of all EU Member States are aimed at overcoming the adverse effects of the crisis, economic recovery and adjustment to the conditions on the global level, in accordance with the EU vision of development and action by 2020. The EU vision is the particular issue that has become the focus of discussions among the EU Member States. Answering the question of EU vision for the future will also clarify the prospects of both aspirant and candidate countries for EU membership.

The European Union is certainly the major peace project in European history, which has, thus far, proved to be a successful one. Although the ideas that guided the EU architects have never been more relevant, it seems that they have somehow been forgotten. The world, security and economic crises remind us that these values should be reaffirmed in a new light and in a novel way.

I particularly wish to refer to the question giving rise to a considerable political, economic and even security controversy in a number of EU Member States. That is the EU enlargements policy and the alleged "enlargement fatigue". The Western Balkan countries, more than 2/3 of

trade of which is with the EU countries, believe that it is absolutely indispensable to continue the enlargements policy so as to expand to the region of the Western Balkans. I believe that the process must not be slowed down or discontinued after Croatia's admission to EU membership. Many European states put the blame for their political, economic and security problems on EU enlargements, in defiance of the existing facts. It is not my intention to draw your attention to statistics, but economic indicators, both of the so-called "old EU Member States", as well as the new ones, speak in favour of enlargements. Today, after bloc divisions and redefinition of the intra-European relations, Europe is no longer the same place as when the EU creation had started, which in no way diminishes the value and importance of the basic political, economic and social principles on which it was established. Now, more than ever before, we need solidarity, unity, pragmatism, constructiveness and self-consciousness. There can be no prosperity for all the peoples living in these lands without the integration of all European states in their common home. Whoever in this globalized world, under whatever pretext, thinks that, by closing up in their narrow shells, will become more competitive and effective on the international scene, simply does not understand the reality.

The Western Balkan region very much affects peace, security and prosperity in the European continent; EU enlargement is a very significant component of a successful EU security policy in eliminating the risks of future instability, but it is also the best mechanism for the process of reconciliation, cooperation and stability in areas that used to be burdened by conflicts.

You know that the countries in our region have set EU membership on top of their foreign policy priorities. On the other hand, aware of the numerous problems currently facing the European Union, they are not asking for new rules or conditions to be set, but only those recognized and agreed as accession criteria. I can say with certainty that Serbia is really and truly committed to meeting these criteria. I believe that the European integration process of Serbia is of crucial importance for the integration of the whole region, and that the EU will appreciate the efforts being made in a way that will get Serbia and the entire region closer to the EU and, ultimately, make it a full-fledged member.

In recent months, Serbia has taken strategically important steps to assure its European future, thus contributing to the overall stability of the SEE region and Europe. Serbia has agreed to enter into dialogue with Pristina at a high political level, with the facilitation of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy C. Ashton and reached, with a lot of effort and at tremendous political risk, in mid-April this year, an agreement with Pristina on resolving the issue of status of the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija.

Consequently, Serbia has not recognized the independence of "Kosovo", but mindful of the realities on the ground and the need to solve the issues relevant to the daily lives of Serbs and Albanians in a mutually acceptable way, made a historic step forward in addressing the issue of Kosovo and Metohija and the position of Serbs in this territory. The agreement on the establishment of the Community/Association of Serbian Municipalities, which is in accordance with the international legislation on the status of such communities, especially with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, created conditions for dealing with the issue of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Furthermore, the Implementation Plan for the Agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, and the adoption of an Action Plan for its implementation, showed that the Government of Serbia

was determined to carry out the obligations in full and thus remove the last obstacle standing the way of a positive decision by the next European Council meeting. We, on our part, expect the European Union to deliver on the promises given to us, as set out late last year in the form of conditions for opening the accession negotiations. Any other outcome would have a negative impact on the continuation of the all-embracing reform process we have embarked upon and through which, and there is probably no need for me to stress it any further, we have contributed to the overall stability and security in our region and Europe at large.

In these times of crisis, we are witness to the need to design a new architecture of European relations in order to create a united new Europe, while the completely new security challenges and the imperative of responding to them have necessitated a joint effort to formulate a new and different defence and security policy. Different geo-strategic relationships have highlighted the need for developing different means of promoting the EU as a global factor having a distinct policy and defence and civilian resources available in crisis management and maintenance of international peace and security. A new image projected in international relations implies the necessity of developing and applying a wide range of instruments and resources (from political, diplomatic, economic, financial, to civilian, and military) in the context of strengthening the concept of "permanent structured cooperation".

The position and role of Serbia in the further evolution of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) are being reflected in the implementation of the priorities identified by the Serbian Government, namely that Serbia starts its EU accession negotiations as soon as possible, speeds up the European integration process, carries out internal reforms and contributes to the development of the region. The aim is to establish mutual trust and lay a foundation for participation in EU operations, which is a key for its partner relations with the EU in the defence and security sector. Serbia is committed to strengthening cooperation on ESDP with the EU in order to make its own contribution to peace and security, through equitable cooperation with the Member States of the European Union that Serbia itself aspires to join. In conclusion, I would like to recall once again that the enlargement policy has proved to be an important instrument of stability and security in Europe and as such should be kept, and not neglected in any way, regardless of the current economic and financial difficulties. I believe that the core value behind the European idea, which is peace and stability, is an environment where a way out of various crises can be found more easily and level-headedly, and not the other way around.

The national and cultural identity of Serbia and of other countries in the region, as well, is part and parcel of the cultural pattern of the European Union based on the slogan "unity in diversity". At the same time, the common European values embodied in the fundamental democratic principles are being taken over. Eligibility for membership of the European Union will help build a functional, sustainable and efficient system of the EU, and the accession process itself gives a strong impetus to the political and economic reforms in Serbia and in the region as a whole.

Thank you.