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Foreign Minister Bakoyiannis,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start off by thanking Mr. Kekic and the rest of the *Economist* team for putting together this important event.

Our topic is whether there are ways to enhance stabilization efforts in the Balkans during the “times of turmoil.”

Recent developments have made many objectives we believed were within easy reach much harder to attain than before. One gets the impression that the scope of what is achievable has lessened, as the gravity of the situation has come into full focus.

Nonetheless, my opinion is that gradual progress does remain possible. Such ambition may not sound as lofty, but it is more tangible, and more realistic.

I believe that we should work on re-calibrating the measure of success. Not much room is left for reassuring promises. At this stage, we should concentrate on what is feasible—and act accordingly. Saying the right things remains important. Producing concrete results, on the other hand, matters more than ever before.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Under the leadership of President Boris Tadic, the Republic of Serbia will continue with responsible and constructive policies. Every step we take is meant to enhance the stability of the Western Balkans.

We have been doing this under incredibly trying circumstances. It is no exaggeration to say that we are in the most difficult period of our political transition to date.

We had two elections in the first half of last year: one presidential, the other parliamentary. These were, as a matter of fact, referenda about how to interact with the world of today. Our citizens were given a clear choice. And they decided to cast their vote for a European future. Twice.

All this took place in the somber context of the unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo.

At the time, we made it clear that we would never recognize UDI. This position is enshrined in our constitution, and will not change.

I want to use this opportunity to reaffirm our gratitude to the vast majority of UN member States, including the Hellenic Republic, for their principled respect of Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The solidarity and support we have received is giving us confidence in the ultimate success of our endeavor.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We chose to respond to Pristina's ethnically-motivated attempt at secession peacefully, within the rules of the international system.

At Serbia's initiative, an issue of such fundamental importance and complexity—passionately involving all at once identity, boundaries, communal rights, opposing historical narratives—was steered clear of resorting to the force of arms for the first time in the history of the Western Balkans.

Moreover, we worked with other stakeholders to overcome the gathering crisis of legitimacy to international action in Kosovo. A binding agreement welcomed by the Security Council was reached on the UN's reconfiguration and the status-neutrality of the European Law and Order Mission in Kosovo.

We are currently focused on finding concrete, pragmatic solutions to everyday problems that affect the citizens of our southern province. Despite an increase in the level of mistrust and animosity resulting from UDI, tensions throughout Kosovo are being managed.

We must continue to find ways to constructively engage on a whole host of practical issues—within the parameters established by the Security Council. Legitimate interests and red lines must be respected. This will require enhanced coordination, and a greater sensitivity to all the aspects of the multi-dimensional reality on the ground in our breakaway province.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia's strategic decision to contest the Kosovo issue at the International Court of Justice—by prevailing in the United Nations General Assembly—constituted a paradigm shift in favor of peace in the Western Balkans.

The Court will take about a year to deliberate on the matter. The case of Kosovo's attempt at secession has attracted enormous attention from all corners of the world—as the active participation before the Court of thirty-six countries in the UDI proceedings make clear. It marks the first time ever that the ICJ has been asked to consider the legality of a move to forcibly partition a UN member State, in defiance of the Security Council.

The Court's conclusions will have far-reaching consequences for the United Nations system as a whole. That is why it is so important that the judicial process be allowed to run its course, free of political interference.

We should all respect the fact that the ICJ is deliberating on the issue. No one should pre-judge the Court's deliberations. Therefore, new UDI recognitions should not be encouraged. And multilateral bodies should not be pressured to extend membership to the secessionist authorities in Pristina. Such initiatives could only upset the unstable equilibrium on the ground, which is surely not in anyone's interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another priority item of our foreign policy agenda is the enhancement of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Serbia is an indispensable anchor of stability in the Western Balkans—a critical component in the achievement of the central strategic priority our countries share: membership in the European Union.

I remain firmly convinced that the process of enlargement can only be completed by working in

concert, and not at cross-purposes. Mutual support and genuine encouragement are not merely policy options, but strategic necessities. If I had to define Serbia's regional agenda in one sentence, it would be: more cooperation, on more issues, more often.

To be honest, working together has gotten to be more of a challenge. This is because some of our neighbors made regrettable choices to recognize Kosovo's UDI. As a result, new regional fissures have arisen. Nevertheless, Belgrade has continued to act responsibly.

That is why our key word in regional affairs remains engagement—genuine engagement—despite our differences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is becoming apparent that the road to Europe is not without its obstacles and detours. More than ever before, the region's leaders need to focus on achievable goals. When it comes to Serbia, the most attainable objective is visa liberalization.



Freedom of movement, the right to travel visa-free, is an embodiment of what the EU is to the average citizen of Serbia.

Restrictions on travel to Europe should be lifted. They constitute an undue burden on our people. The bureaucratic impediments are relics of a past we have moved far, far beyond. Frankly, their maintenance is indefensible.

There should be no such thing as a second-class European. There should be no distinction between those who are free, and those who are less free.

This issue needs to be resolved in the near future. It would go a long way to securing regional stability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Across our continent, we hear voices saying that a feeling of malaise is coming to dominate the European discourse. They claim that post-Lisbon constitutional uncertainty, coupled with the global financial meltdown, has the effect of making the EU unable to absorb Serbia and the rest of the Western Balkans—that the process of enlargement is complete.

The Government of Serbia doesn't subscribe to this fatalistic point of view. We *will* get to the finish line—crisis or no crisis.

In the meantime, Serbia will strive to further improve regional cooperation, and to fully harmonize our legislation with that of the European Union.

We will also continue to reach out to nations beyond the EU and the Russian Federation—a country with which we enjoy a special relationship.

By fully opening our market to the world, we will come to forge new partnerships for prosperity. As a result, we will emerge from the crisis even stronger.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The pursuit of these policies is designed to maximize the benefits for our citizens and the region in this time of crisis. This will enable us to keep doing what needs to be done to raise our domestic standards of governance to the level of the European mainstream.

But it is essential that none of us lose sight of the overall strategic prize—a Europe truly whole, free and at peace. When it comes to the Western Balkans, we need less talk, fewer promises, and more action.

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Does anyone remember Joschka Fischer famously asking, “*Quo vadis Europa?*”

His answer was as right on the mark—back then, in May 2000, and even more so today. This is what he said: “Onwards to the completion of European integration. A step backwards,” he added, “even just standing still in contentment with what has been achieved, would demand a fatal price of all EU member States and of all those that want to become members.” And he concluded: “it would demand a fatal price above all of our people, for enlargement is a supreme national interest for all European states.”

Well, let me echo his words to you today: EU membership is a ‘supreme national interest’ for my country—the strategic answer to the question, “quo vadis Serbia?”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If you take away just one thing from my remarks to you today, let it be this: come what may, Serbia will remain on track.

We will not waiver. We will not be discouraged. We will be responsible, and we will stay the course.

Thank you very much.