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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to address you here at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade.

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Serbia is a country of turbulent disposition. Standing at one of the great crossroads of civilizations, it has been the playground of imperial ambitions throughout centuries. At times part of the problem, more often part of the solution, Serbia has rarely been relegated to the sidelines of history.

Let me dwell for a moment on the origin of this historical singularity.

The first genuine ruler of the Serbian people, Grand Duke Stefan Nemanja, gave his nation three sons. At the age of eighteen, in the year 1193, the youngest son, Rastko, came into contact with a monk from the Holy Mountain of Athos, who led him away to that great spiritual center of Eastern Christianity. There he was tonsured, and given the name Sava. He went on to found the Serbian Orthodox Church, which later became the pillar of Serbian national identity.

But Sava was not merely a spiritual leader. He was Serbia's first chief arbiter—our nation's first diplomat, so to speak. For after his father's death, Sava was called, on several occasions, to intervene in the political affairs of the lands his brothers had inherited. His political successes created a realm of national stability that enabled the Serbian people to establish a kingdom for close to 200 years, until the military defeat by the Ottomans at Kosovo Polje in 1389—and then, after 1804 and our Uprising against the occupiers, to once more begin building a sovereign state on the foundations of the Medieval one.

But Sava's deeds accomplished more than that. They established an almost primordial confidence in the ability of our nation to survive against all odds, by instilling a memory of the founding of Serbia that subtly fused the material with the spiritual, the past with the future, the human with the divine. Consider Saint Sava's words: “Faith can only save us if united with, and expressed in, good works.”

I believe this dignified combination of faith and good works, of seeking to understand the future through the prism of the past, and of striving to work in the present to achieve such a future, forms the basis of the character of Serbian singularity.

It also stands at the very origin of our arrival onto the European historical scene. I turn to a letter Saint Sava wrote shortly before he returned to God. “At first we were confused”, he wrote. “The East thought that we were the West, while the West thought we were the East. Some of us misunderstood our place in the clash of currents, so they cried that we belong to neither side,

while others cried that we belong exclusively to one side or the other. But I say that we are destined to be the East in the West, and the West in the East”, he concluded.

This conception of being between East and West lives at the heart of the singular, complicated, age-old predicament of Serbia. It is an essential part of who we are. And when properly understood, it contains a moral compass, a sense of belonging and adapting to greater geo-political currents.

The major exception was the 1990s. I believe that is why they were so traumatic for us. Forces arising from within our midst came into conflict with the healthy interpretation of our centuries-old inheritance, and destroyed much of what our ancestors had painstakingly built across the tattered fabric of time. That is why the name of Slobodan Milosevic will always be associated with a national disgrace, for he brought great shame to the Serbian people in his treacherous usurpation of Serbian singularity.

As a matter of fact, the 1990s illustrate the dark side of our singularity. As the Berlin Wall came down, and as nations from both sides of the Iron Curtain were coming together in a great act of reconciliation, Serbia stood apart. We ignored the tide of history. We put our blinders on. And we reached for each other's throats in the Balkans.

That turbulent time has passed, although we still feel its consequences. Choices still need to be made—fundamental choices that will affect the future course of the entire region. The battle for

the soul of the Western Balkans has not yet been fought to a finish. *What is our ultimate destination?* Such is the grand question of this generation.

Thankfully, we have the works of our predecessors to guide us in difficult times. Their examples provide us with the tools to plan transformational change, to implement our vision, to make the improbable possible. But such examples drawn from the manifestations of our singularity can only be of use if we have the prudence and far-sightedness to differentiate between tactical maneuvers and strategic goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Consider the deeds of the visionary founders of modern Serbian diplomacy. After the restoration of Serbian statehood in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, men such as Jovan Marinkovic and Filip Hristic solidified the place of Serbia as a junior member of the Concert of Europe.

Later, after the Congress of Berlin, when Serbia was at last recognized as a fully sovereign state, national architects in the tradition of Jovan Ristic and Stojan Novakovic led the way in

deepening Serbia's relations with the European capitals, at a time of illusory stability and increased international rigidity.

Next, in the wake of the two Balkan Wars, the First World War and the founding of the South Slavic state, Serbian diplomacy was able to consolidate the international position of the new country on the foundations of the European order forged at Versailles. Think only of the fact that Jovan Ducic and Ivo Andric were appointed as ambassadors during the inter-war period, and you get a sense of the vision of their superiors at that time.

Then came the Second World War. Fascism was defeated, at a horrendous cost to our nation. Rising out of the ashes of that terrible conflict, a new socialist Yugoslavia was born. The golden age of our diplomacy came into being. It was led by Koca Popovic, who began his diplomatic career during the time of the Partisans, when he helped sway the Allies to the cause of Tito.

The erudite Koca, who came from a prominent pre-war Belgrade family, helped steer the country away from the grip of Stalin in 1948. This enabled Yugoslavia to carve a singular role for itself in the Cold War era. His knowledge of the ways of the Soviets, the French and the Anglo-Americans, his understanding of the complexities of the situation in the Middle East, and his conception and implementation of Yugoslavia's uncontested position of leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, all enabled our country to play a disproportionately large role on the global stage, including the United Nations General Assembly and its Security Council, on which our country sat a record four times as a non-permanent member.

Koca's two most notable successors, Marko Nikezic and Mirko Tepavac, built on his strategic outlook and achievements. Our country was one of the main mediators in the Middle East crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s. And later, when the international situation demanded it, Yugoslavia reached out to Western Europe through the Helsinki process—inoculating itself from the specter of the dangerous doctrine of limited sovereignty.

Unfortunately, these authentic embodiments of our singularity fell out of favor by the end of the 1970s. An opportunity was missed to incorporate Yugoslavia into the European Community. Ideology trumped foresight and healthy self-confidence. And so the system slowly began to implode: ideas about which course to take—both domestically and internationally—lacked direction as well as substance.

The country's increasing rigidity in the 1980s contributed to the rise of the extremist views of Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, Alija Izetbegovic, and others, resulting in civil war that led to the violent dismemberment of Yugoslavia.

Without genuine representatives of the positive singularity that informed so many centuries of national undertakings, a critical mass of Serbs failed to recognize the erroneous deeds that were being committed on their behalf—until it was much too late.

One could say that at the moment when the East chose to face West, Milosevic chose to face East. Zoran Djindjic called this the moment of “epic tardiness”, adding that “there is nothing so

weak as an idea whose time has irrevocably passed.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The depth of the weakness of that idea was tragically exposed for all the world to see. And yet, arising out the rubble of the NATO bombing, the positive singularity of Serbia once more returned to the forefront. A democratic coalition was formed on the platform of a return to the strategic approach to national development. Its basis was a bedrock conviction in the value of comprehensive engagement with our neighbors, Europe, and the world.

And on October 5<sup>th</sup>, we began to succeed. A sort of idealism without illusions characterized those years. True leadership returned to the scene. Economic and social renewal began in earnest. And we faced forward while proudly respecting the achievements of our predecessors.

We realized that Serbia could benefit only through a grand-strategy that understood the transformational times in which we live. That recognized moving towards membership in the European Union was the only viable option to pursue. But that also understood the easterly shift in the global balance of power. That the emerging markets of today would become the dominant



ones of tomorrow. That trans-national arrangements will be marked by heightened instability, as interests diverge and comprehensive alternatives are postulated. That, in short, the international community is becoming less coherent and more unpredictable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A majority of Serbian citizens believe that our ultimate destination should be the European Union. I hope that most of us in this room would agree on that.

Let me share with you three reasons why I believe that choosing Europe is in Serbia's national interest.

First, Europe has demonstrated an unparalleled capacity to deliver sustainable economic growth and prosperity. Every single state that has become a member of the European Union has felt the tangible material benefits of membership. Every single one has benefited—the post-communist transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe most of all.

Take the case of Slovakia.

When I was a child, my parents took us on a holiday there. The Cold War was still on.

I remember how it was then: gloomy, poor, and uncomfortable. Decaying Bratislava was depressing. The countryside was really backward. There were no highways. Stores had no food on their shelves. There was little or no foreign investment.

Everything was a uniform shade of gray.

Today, Slovakia is unrecognizable to those who remember its communist past. Bratislava has transformed itself into a vibrant, exciting, affluent capital. The country's towns and villages are enjoying a renaissance. Its farmers earn a good living: agricultural subsidies, for instance, have never been higher.

Its infrastructure has been modernized: highways built, roads re-paved, rail links updated. People have money to buy the goods and services on sale in the growing number of stores and shopping malls opening throughout the land. And they have enough left over to place it in the bank or invest it in the stock market.

All this has been made possible because of the stability and security provided by the Slovak Republic's accession to the European Union, and its access to EU's common market.

There is no doubt about it: the European Union works. It delivers what it promises: a better, more rewarding and prosperous life for all.

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Another reason to continue actively to seek membership in the EU concerns our sense of belonging to something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

It is a civilizational category. Serbia's singular heritage, our culture, our beliefs, and our history bind us to a constellation of nations that have come to instill what one European statesman called “a sense of enlarged patriotism.”

And this brings me to the final reason why I believe Serbia belongs in the European Union—values. More specifically, democratic values, and what they can truly come to mean for Serbia.

Democracy is not the mere holding of elections. Democracy in the Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century is about equality, pluralism, and diversity. It is about the interdependence of individual liberty with the rule of law, human and minority rights, and integration. It is about living together in a community of shared values, not living side by side as strangers merely sharing a passport, a flag, and an anthem.

Entrenching these values in the Serbian collective would give substance to the belief that our present hopes can become our future realities. And it would provide a context in which the ennoblement of our singularity could take shape—by fusing it to a historical process that places democratic values at the center of its being.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia's membership in the European Union is not a panacea; it is not the solution to every problem. Differences would remain. However, it would provide a safe, democratic framework within which these differences could be dealt with.

The European Union is one of the grandest political projects ever undertaken. It is the embodiment of a commitment to national transformation, an antidote to self-isolation.

But there is more than a slight chance that Serbia will not join the EU. It is not a foregone conclusion. The eventual success of our European endeavor is not guaranteed.

The EU is in the process of consolidating its newly constructed identity, formalized in the Lisbon Treaty. It is becoming a rising, integrated colossus on the world stage.

I get the sense that we find ourselves at the closing stage of enlargement, that the outer borders of the European Union are being set.

This is a dramatic moment, and we must not fail to realize its geo-strategic significance.

While Serbia hesitates, while we keep deliberating about whether to choose Europe, the gates may very well close.

That is why I so strongly believe that Europe is a choice we must make *now*. It is up to us. It is up to this generation to choose—for itself and those that will follow it: To choose Europe, or self-isolation.

There is no middle ground.

There is no ambiguous way forward.

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“Just a moment”, some could say. “We *do* have a credible alternative. That alternative is Russia.”

Our two nations have greatly benefited from a centuries-old friendship. Russia helped us materially and spiritually as we struggled to overcome five hundred years of Ottoman occupation. We were allied in two world wars. And the longstanding tradition of closeness between our two nations continues to grow and to deepen in the present.

But in the interdependent world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believe that Serbia's European accession would give a new, *more profound* meaning to our special relationship with Russia. Not only would it ensure that Moscow would have a true friend in Brussels, and deepen Russia's access to the common European market, but it would also lead to an increase in both understanding and cooperation between Russia and the Union.

Only through membership in the EU could Serbia serve as a bridge between the two. Only by joining the EU could we make full use of our closeness with Russia, and fulfill the founding vision of the definer of our singularity, Saint Sava. Let us not deal ourselves a weak hand. Let us not forget the words: “we are destined to be the East in the West, and the West in the East.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will have an opportunity to make a choice on Europe on May 11<sup>th</sup>. It may be our last chance to pass through the gates before they are shut.

Some are trying to mislead us by saying that this election is about preserving our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

That's not what this election is about. And the reason is simple: on this fundamental issue—on this question that concerns the very nature of the identity of our nation—there is hardly any disagreement in Serbia.

An overwhelming majority of us are determined to oppose, obstruct, and ultimately overturn the unilateral declaration of independence of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.



I believe that we have demonstrated this commitment beyond all shadow of a doubt. And I tell you that our diplomatic initiatives have contained the scope of recognition of Kosovo's independence. Through our actions we have created a sense of uncertainty in the ultimate success of the secessionist project that has attempted to forcibly partition our country, in clear violation of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and UNSCR 1244.

The arguments we have used have been principled. And they have been largely devoid of rhetoric which would only make us feel good, while failing to advance our goals.

*Here is what we have said.*

*First, UDI is an attack on our democracy, whose potential success would leave missing a crucial component of the region's security architecture. Think back to the terms of peace imposed in June 1999 on a defeated regime that explicitly reaffirmed that Kosovo remained a part of Serbia, while giving the United Nations a mandate to administer the province's internal affairs.*

*Serbia remained whole under dictatorship. But now, when Serbia is a democracy, having demonstrated its dedication to engage with the world and integrate into Europe, we are being punished as no country has been in peacetime. How could this not affect our democratic capacity to continue along the course charted by the statesmen of October 5<sup>th</sup>?*

*Second, UDI divides the region. The countries of the Western Balkans have inescapably been put in a situation to choose between Serbia and Kosovo. Let us understand what that means: choosing to recognize the UDI of our province of Kosovo means choosing to explicitly disregard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. The direct, regrettable repercussion of such a choice is the downgrading of the comprehensive set of ties with Serbia.*

*And it's a shame, for instead of rallying under the banner of regional solidarity, some have chosen to side with those outside the Western Balkans who were in a hurry to impose a solution in our part of the world, while at the same time arguing that imposing solutions to similar conflicts in other areas of the globe would be counterproductive.*

*Third, UDI makes our path to membership in the European Union much more complicated. We have to be honest about that. Not because recognizing UDI will ever be a pre-condition for accession—that will not happen—but because the European Union, is today closely associated by many in Serbia with support for UDI. And that has resulted in a whole lot of uncertainty and confusion. It has become acceptable to ask, “for all the talk about reason and Enlightenment, for all the declinations on the common good and solidarity, isn't Europe just another place where might makes right?”*

*Our fourth argument is that UDI clearly violates international law. A revival of the debate about the legitimacy of internationally recognized borders has been triggered. For the illegal attempt by Kosovo to unilaterally secede from Serbia has created a dangerous precedent.*

*This precedent legitimizes the doctrine of imposing solutions to ethnic conflicts. It transforms the right to self-determination into an avowed right to independence. It legitimizes the forced partition of internationally-recognized, sovereign states. And it violates the commitment to the peaceful and consensual resolution of disputes in Europe.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have presented these arguments to the Security Council, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and in countless national capitals and multilateral fora.

We will keep doing so. We will keep making the case that Kosovo should not be recognized, and that it should not be admitted to regional and international organizations.

Now I want to tell you that we have been relatively successful so far—certainly more so than many thought we could be, despite tremendous pressures by the powerful advocates of Kosovo's independence. No more than 40 countries have recognized Kosovo until today. And

that number does not appear to be massively rising. We have worked hard to counter the short-sighted attempt to sacrifice the region's geo-political priorities on the altar of the communal aspirations of the Kosovo Albanians. And we have done so with valor, dignity and determination—doing honor to the singularity that is the essence of our national inheritance.

But the task is far from complete. Several measures must be taken in the months to follow if we are to place ourselves in a position in which we can achieve our ultimate goal: a mutually-acceptable agreement on the future status of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Our plan is to put a resolution before the General Assembly of the United Nations in September that would ask the International Court of Justice to rule on the legality of UDI. This is an initiative we have presented to a large number of countries, and have found it to be a very persuasive argument against recognition.

Of course, we cannot know the ICJ ruling in advance. But it seems inconceivable to me that the Court would ignore the unambiguous legal parameters that stand at the foundation of the international system established in 1945.

Once the ICJ rules on the UDI, we will all come face to face with the fact that Kosovo will not join the world community of sovereign nations. It will not acquire this ultimate status of international legitimacy. It will remain unattractive to foreign investment; unresponsive to the

rule of law; and incapable of preventing its freefall to failure—without the engagement of Belgrade.

When the underlying implications of such a destabilizing outcome sink in, a new window of opportunity will open up, in which, perhaps for the first time, a true negotiation can take place—serious negotiations that will continue until all parties agree to a solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have tried to lay before you my understanding of Serbia's singularity manifested over time, its healthy developments, and its tragic exception. I have also tried to present to you my understanding of the challenges we face at present, and to impart with you my vision of the future course I believe is right for our country to pursue.

What I want to do in conclusion is to share with you the verses that put all this together in my mind—verses that many of us first came across in high school. They were written about a hundred years ago by the great poet and diplomat Milan Rakic, in his poem entitled *At Gazimestan*

:

“Today they tell us, the children of this century,

That we are disrespectful to this history of ours,

That we have been caught in the currents of the West

And that our souls are afraid of danger.”

Many of us have been so accused—in great part by those who have not put enough distance between themselves and the darkness of the 1990s.

And those of us who found strength in the tradition of singularity they perverted to justify their own mistakes, have rarely taken them on directly.

Well let me do so now, building on the response that Milan Rakic formulated against those who sought to undermine what he and others were creating at such great sacrifice.

I believe Serbian singularity teaches us that the future is uncertain, that one's friends are imperfect, and that no cause is ever truly just. Guarding against the temptation to isolate ourselves from the world is not mere pragmatism. It is survival, predicated on a healthy caution against those who champion an illusion, and advocate the use of all means to get there.

This does not mean turning away from our singular national achievements, but rather facing square on the real prospect of being left behind. To downplay the geo-strategic significance of the present moment, is to precipitate the repetition of recent failures.

Today, the promise of the centuries-old idea of a strong, confident Serbia must not be allowed to languish because of its misdirected pursuit by men who dishonored us before the world.

If this seems confrontational, that is because it is. It is confrontation with those who choose to misrepresent the meaning of Serbian singularity. We must not allow ourselves to be put on the defensive by people who are prepared to sacrifice our strategic national interest for the sake of a little more support in the electoral body. This must stop. The lying must cease. The vicious populism must come to an end.

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Let me conclude with a story.

When Prince Milos went to Stambul to speak to the Sultan, he found it appropriate to put on a turban. It produced a reaction by some who felt that he had again embraced what the nation had rejected, by rising up against the occupiers. But they were wrong. For he had a strategic vision of how to implement the national interest, of which he was a chief architect.

Milos took seriously the bequest of Sava. He understood diplomatic realities. He was an idealist without illusions. He understood what had to be done. And he did it, without being any less of a patriot.

Thank you for your attention.