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Excellencies,

Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am proud to stand before the children of Hus, Comenius and Palacky. It was here that medieval theocracy's stranglehold on politics, culture, and faith was first broken. It was here that the fight for spiritual liberty began, and here the first preparations for the modern development of Europe took place. It was also here that the "prison of nations"—in Edvard Beneš's words—first began to be besieged.

And I am especially proud to be the first ever Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia to address Charles University—one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Europe.

This cultural metropolis, this living, beating heart of Prague, was once defined as "škola slovena", or the School of the Slavs, by the great Serbian scientist and alumnus of this venerable place, Nikola Tesla.

He too was a brainchild of the Czech lands—as were the countless other Serbs who came here in ever-growing numbers during the latter half of the 19th and early parts of the 20th centuries, seeking an education they felt only Charles University could provide. The catalyst for this educational migration was the Prague Slav Congress of 1849—at which a decision was reached to work together to liberate our respective nations from foreign rule. What was begun there continues to provide the thread that has woven a fabric of deep friendship and genuine understanding between our two peoples for more than one hundred and fifty years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overall goal of wave upon wave of Serb students at Charles University was simple: to become part of the vanguard that was to play a role in the full restoration and development of Serbian statehood. Like countless Czechs, they too walked in your libraries, sat in your classrooms, and listened to your teachers. Like your predecessors, they too were inspired by men such as Tomas Masaryk, a former Charles University professor and the first President of Czechoslovakia, who once wrote that “we shall always be a small minority in the world, but when a small nation accomplishes something with its limited means, what it achieves has an immense and exceptional significance. It is a deliberate and discerning love of a nation that appeals to me, for institutions by themselves are not enough,” he said.

They were inspired by his words, and took courage in his many deeds—as for example when he successfully defended 53 Serbs accused of treason by the Dual Monarchy in 1908, as a deputy in the Vienna parliament.

A towering figure of the 20th century, Masaryk was a great friend of my nation who at one point, in 1915, even advocated a union between the Czech lands and Serbia—so close was the bond he felt existed between us.

This bond was forever cemented during the First World War. A few days ago was Armistice Day—the day we remember those gallant many who helped change and democratize the map of Europe forever. I was in London on that day. And as I stood in silence on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, I thought back to the shared sacrifice of our two nations to the cause of liberty in Europe. I thought back to the Czechoslovak Legion—to the volunteer military units composed of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war—and to its origins in 1915 as a Serbian volunteer division on the eastern front. Tens of thousands of Czechs and Serbs fought and died together on numerous fields of battle against the Dual Monarchy, perhaps inspired by the memory of the Czech František Zah, my country's first Chief of the General Staff and the founder of our Military Academy.

And I thought back to the alliance forged in war and consolidated in peace—to the Little Entente and the conviction of its founders that survival depended on coming together on the basis of democratic values, to defend against those who wished to deny our nations their rightful place in the European constellation.

Let us not forget that this was a time dominated by isolationist sentiment—a time of fear and uncertainty, of financial crisis and self-doubt. Oswald Spengler had proclaimed the Decline of the West, the Middle East was stirring, the established European democracies were both restless and timid, and a former World War One corporal was about to seize power in Berlin.

And yet statesmen such as Foreign Ministers Edvard Beneš in Prague and Bogoljub Jevtic in Belgrade did not waver. With the signing of the Pact of Organization of the Little Entente in 1933, they seized history by its reigns and tried valiantly to alter its course.

In a sense, these men of vision helped pave the way for the creation of the European Union decades later. Their failure was transformed over time into a success they could not have believed was ever possible.

And so we owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to these and other Serbian and Czech forefathers of the post-war European project to secure the peace and deliver prosperity to what Jan Patočka once called the “sole rational civilization.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we stand on the other side of those historical events. The peace has been largely secured, and Europe is no longer a place of great divisions. The European Union has become a strategic reality—a new political form in which a growing number of democratic countries freely pool their sovereignty to create something novel: an entity that is more than an alliance, and less than a country.

In a bitter twist of fate, our two nations were excluded from its early development. Yet we maintained our solidarity as much as the circumstances permitted. In 1968 for example, Belgrade played host to the largest demonstration anywhere in Europe against the suppression of the Prague Spring. In the 1970s and 1980s, we sheltered many Czech dissidents, and opened up our printing presses, theatres and concert halls to the artistic expression of resistance that helped to bring about the Velvet Revolution and, together with it, the renaissance of Europe.

The delayed enjoyment of what we helped to create perhaps helps to explain our complicated view of the European Union in the 21st century.

We embrace the fact that there is no doubt the European project has, since its inception, built up its credibility by delivering lasting peace and sustainable prosperity. But the truth also is that decision-making has become overly bureaucratized, whilst recent efforts at reform have not yet born fruit. We feel that the noble construct of soft power that is the EU has entered into a seemingly profound crisis of confidence. Institutional malaise and enlargement fatigue are amongst the symptoms of the democratic deficit all of us are becoming too familiar with.

While sharing a constructive realism towards the EU, rooted in a common recollection of the sacrifices our nations have made to be counted amongst the sovereign states of the Old Continent, the perspective from which we gaze at what has become the European achievement is different.

The Czech Republic is a member of the EU, while Serbia is not there yet. I do not intend to enter into a long discussion of the reasons why we have not yet joined you in Brussels. I do wish to point out, however, the important political distinction between divorce and integration on the one hand, and conflict and division on the other.

What I would like to do for the remainder of my remarks is to focus on how we can draw on the deeds of our political ancestors to channel the present moment into a common future—how we can, in a sense, re-consecrate the special relationship and come together as sovereign equals in the House of Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbian President Boris Tadić once said that “in politics, through a prudent determination of the end, we can change the situation. We can add something new to it, something of our own. For a small nation, this constitutes political statesmanship, political creation.” Quoting Masaryk, he added, “This is the poetry of life.”

It is to this poetry, to this promise of statesmanship, to which I now turn.

The Czech Republic will assume the Presidency of the European Union on January 1st 2009. Some have expressed their deep concern. “Prague is not up to the challenge,” they say. Well, I think they’re wrong. I think they underestimate you. I think they wrongly dismiss the strength of your commitment to cementing the democratic gains the Czech nation was instrumental in delivering to all the peoples of Europe. And I think they downplay the dignity of your past, as you seek to reach beyond the present.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Czech Republic has made it clear that a priority of its EU Presidency will be the advancement of the membership perspective of the Western Balkans, with Serbia at its center. I truly welcome your commitment, and I want to tell you that I can think of no better country to deliver on the promise made at the Thessaloniki Summit of 2003, where the European future of the Western Balkans was first clearly stated.

When I say to you that Serbia is a country proud of its history, I think you know exactly what I mean. I think you instinctively understand how dedicated our democratic leadership is to pursuing policies that will propel the region generationally forward—and why the central

strategic priority of the Republic of Serbia is rapid accession to the European Union.

Serbia wants to join the EU, not only for reasons of geography, heritage, and economic prosperity, but also because of the values we hold in common. These values constitute the intangible excellence of 21st-century Europe, and they form the foundation of our democracy, our efforts at reconciliation, and our beliefs in what we can accomplish. They remind us of the importance of cooperation, compromise and consensus-building, while prompting us to remain true to the moral compass the values themselves provide to all who have the prescience to see beyond the first obstacle on the way.

What is also of great significance is that Europe has become *the* unifying force of the region: my country's dedication to join the EU is shared by all the countries of the Western Balkans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The point of no return is within reach. Let us have the courage, and the vision, to make it a reality. The Czech Presidency comes at precisely the right moment for us all. And let me assure you, Serbia will do its part. For never in the history of our country have we had a more

pro-European administration than that of President Boris Tadić. Never have we been in a better position to deliver on our commitments. Never have we been more able to commence the sprint to the finish line of Europe.

And yet, there seems to be a creeping sense that an opportunity is about to be missed—the best regional opportunity ever to come along to complete the European project in the Western Balkans. Serbia is, unfortunately, not being treated like other EU membership aspirants in the region—despite the fact that we are its natural accession accelerator. We seem to be held to a different set of standards.

Don't you just get the feeling that when some in the EU looks to Serbia, they say: *sui generis*—unique case? It's not just the Copenhagen criteria, is it? A whole set of additional conditionalities are being unfairly imposed on us.

And this is where I believe the forthcoming Czech Presidency can play a crucial role. Prague can lead the way in ensuring the rapid fulfillment of Serbia's European future—by helping us overcome the challenges we face, instead of perpetuating the creation of new obstacles for us to jump over.

It is high time to set aside out-of-date perceptions. The Interim Agreement must be un-frozen, so that Belgrade and Prague can work together with the rest of the EU to ensure that Serbia achieves Official Candidacy Status in 2009.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If Europe fails to deliver on its promises to Serbia and the rest of the Western Balkans in the very near future, there is a real strategic danger that the destructive potential of the 1990s could be revived. If we are not very careful, the specter of Kosovo could return to center stage and haunt us all in the years to come, as our European membership perspective gets stuck in neutral gear.

We are already standing on very thin ice as it is.

On February 17th, the ethnic-Albanian authorities in our southern province unilaterally declared their independence from Serbia—in blatant violation of our democratic Constitution, the UN Charter, and the Helsinki Final Act, as well as against the will of the Security Council, and the language of resolution 1244 (1999).

Kosovo's ethnic Albanian leaders chose to take this unilateral step after walking away from the negotiating table.

They believed that if they walked away, the path to securing independence would open up before them. They believed it, because that's what they were told. They believed it because an artificial deadline on the talks was affirmed from the outside after which, if no compromise solution was reached, Kosovo's independence would be imposed.

Under such circumstances, a negotiated solution was never a realistic option. With a fixed deadline and a default position that fulfilled their dangerous demands, what incentive did Kosovo's ethnic Albanians have to negotiate with Serbia in good faith? All they had to do was to pretend to engage in a process pre-determined to fail, and wait out the clock.

The incentives for compromise were far outweighed by the incentives for maximalism. The result was the rejection of Serbia's reasonable offer of almost unrestricted self-government—the broadest possible autonomy one can imagine.

But there was another reason—one that struck a blow to the very core of the values of Europe.

Before, and especially during, the negotiations on status, the Kosovo Albanians threatened violence—against the Serbian community in Kosovo and against the international civilian presence tasked with administering the province. This threat was seen as credible. After all, they had carefully orchestrated and carried out a pogrom in March 2004 that killed a number of unarmed civilians and destroyed countless Serbian homes and businesses, as well as 35 churches and monasteries—including a number that were built in the 14th century.

Instead of rejecting this fundamentally anti-European threat, some felt the need to give in—to capitulate. Instead of standing up to the bullies in Pristina, a decision was made to appease them.

And a grave commission of injustice against a young European democracy was the immediate result.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia responded to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence with utmost responsibility and restraint. Despite political turmoil, our country continued to work hard to contribute to maintaining regional stability.

From the very onset of this grave crisis, Serbia ruled out the use of force. And we did not exercise other unilateral options, such as the imposition of economic sanctions, against our breakaway province.

Instead, we opted for a peaceful and diplomatic approach to this attempt at forcible partition of our country—the result of which is that a vast majority of UN member States refrained from recognizing Kosovo's UDI. They continued to abide by their UN Charter obligations to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country.

Serbia proposed a non-confrontational way to respond to the threat posed to its territorial integrity. We chose to use the law.

We asked of the General Assembly to refer the status issue to the International Court of Justice. And on October 8th, the General Assembly agreed with Serbia's position by an overwhelming majority.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This did not please the Kosovo Albanian secessionists. So they turned again to the tactic that had worked so well for them in the past. Soon after February 17th, they began to bully, and they began to threaten—more and more, as the realization that they could not achieve their goal began to sink in.

This all came to the fore a few days ago.

After months of difficult negotiations, an agreement was reached between Serbia and the United Nations on a number of issues of crucial importance for the survival of the Serbian community in Kosovo. This agreement had the explicit endorsement of all UN member States with a stake in the future status of Kosovo.

All had been agreed. A report by the UN Secretary General was to be submitted to the Security Council for approval. It would have legalized the European Union's Law and Order Mission in

Kosovo.

All had been agreed. EULEX was to be bound by the Security Council to be fully status neutral, as well as completely anchor its presence in Kosovo under the authority of the United Nations, in conformity with resolution 1244 (1999).

All had been agreed. A Security Council session had been scheduled for this past Tuesday. And then the bullying coming out of Pristina intensified. Unable to effectively oppose this turning point that has dealt a heavy blow to their secessionist ambitions, the Kosovo Albanian authorities overtly threatened violence and intimidation.

Instead of confronting this fundamental menace, instead of saying that such barbarous threats must not be tolerated, the Security Council session was cancelled, the Secretary General's report was not published, and the values we hold in common were again held hostage to a hostile minority seemingly unwilling to enter the contemporary European mainstream.

When will we learn that passivity has no place in Europe? And when will we finally confront those who seek to destroy what so many generations of European have worked so hard to

build?

Let me say to you clearly that the moment is now.

It is up to the EU to finally stand up to the extremists in Pristina and say to them: “this will not stand. Your rejection of the law will not be tolerated. And your threats will not be accepted.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Decisions reached in the next few days could be decisive. For its part, Serbia is deeply committed to remain a constructive partner. We are ready to engage with the United Nations—and with the European Union we very much want to join—in working through the details of their status-neutral role in Serbia’s southern province. And we are ready to cooperate with our partners to create the conditions for a compromise solution to the future status of Kosovo—one that would be acceptable to all stakeholders, and one that would accelerate, not derail, the entire region’s journey to Brussels.

But we cannot accept to be a part of a mollification strategy that gives in to extremist threats of violence and intimidation.

I conclude with the words of Franz Kafka, another alumnus of Charles University: “By believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it. The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired.”

On behalf of the Republic of Serbia, I say to you: the time has come to create—to create a European Union that looks to the future with optimism, proud of its many identities, and secure of its prospects.

I say to you: the time has come to *believe* and act with the courage of our convictions.

And I say to you: the time has come for moral clarity, statesmanship, and justice to bolster the hearts of men and women throughout the House of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.