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Address to

The Council of Europe **Forum for the Future of Democracy**

**by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić**

**Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of**

**the Council of Europe**

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia**

**Stockholm, 13 June 2007**

Mr. Chairman,

Fellow Ministers,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I am honoured to address you in my capacity as the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The theme of this Session of the Forum for Democracy is the interdependence of democracy and human rights. The aim, as I understand it, is to “strengthen democracy, political freedoms and citizens’ participation through the exchange of ideas, information and examples of best practices.”

Therefore, I feel that it is particularly appropriate that we find ourselves in the Kingdom of Sweden. According to *The Economist* magazine’s democracy index, Sweden stands at the top of the democracy rankings. Democracy has truly been at home in this country, from the instauration of the Age of Freedom in the early seventeen-hundreds, right up to the present day.

I can only hope that this meeting will be a source of inspiration for continued debate not only here in Sweden but throughout the 47 member-states of the Council of Europe, and even beyond. So allow me to wish you much success for fruitful deliberations during this Forum.

Our hosts—the Government of Sweden, the Swedish Parliament and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions —have provided marvelous settings in which we can journey together to strengthen dialogue and participation for the future of democracy.

Before proceeding, let me say that during the four years of our membership in the Council of Europe, the institutions and values on which the Council was founded—and from which it continues to draw strength—have significantly contributed to the democratic consolidation of the social, political and constitutional fabric of the Republic of Serbia.

That is why my country remains fully committed to making significant progress on building a Europe without divisions, without borders—on building a Europe where not only states and politicians, but also citizens, the true stakeholders of our vision, join together to deepen the values we all share. Only in this way can we form a European-wide community for a common democratic future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter are two of the most important instruments at our disposal to fully put into practice our vision of the grand idea of Europe, namely that democracy is interdependent with individual liberty, the rule of law, and human and minority rights

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These invaluable documents enumerate the civic, political, social and economic rights and obligations of both citizens and their states, taking care to portray these rights and obligations as indivisible, as part of the same whole—and promoting them as the way to a more advanced, more tolerant, humane and inclusive Europe.

I believe that an inclusive Europe is a Europe that helps empower local communities and individuals by establishing a level playing field for all. It is a Europe in which the equality of opportunity of all citizens is a reality, a Europe in which marginalized and vulnerable groups of all types have been empowered, a Europe in which the often invisible barriers to the full participation of everyone in the political, social and economic life of our democratic societies, is assured in practice.

Often we hear about the democratic deficit that disaffected citizens across the continent feel and have come to resent. One potential solution is e-democracy, a topic of both this year's and next year's Forum. As you know, the Committee of Ministers has already proposed recommendations on two aspects of e-democracy, namely e-voting and e-governance.

E-democracy could fundamentally redefine the practice of democracy just as the ideas of Montesquieu redefined democratic theory in the eighteenth century. The prudent use of modern information technologies could end up enriching and invigorating the democratic marketplace of ideas, making it a more open and transparent, a more accessible, and a more inclusive space than ever before. But we must devote great care to remain in control of this great potential for progressive cohesion. Otherwise the dangers that the abuse of these technologies could bring could quite simply overwhelm us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not enumerate all the initiatives undertaken by the Council of Europe to advance the ideas and practices of democracy. I am sure that the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. van der Linden, and the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Mr. Skard, will provide you with an overview of the Organization's numerous works at the parliamentary and local government level.

On the intergovernmental side I have already mentioned our work on e-democracy. The Committee of Ministers also vigorously defends freedom of expression and association, fighting for the elimination of discrimination and promoting parity. We continue to actively support the role of NGOs in the democratic process. In fact, later this year the Committee of Ministers will adopt a recommendation on the Legal Status of NGOs in Europe in order to provide

guidance to member

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states on this issue

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As you know, the Committee of Ministers attaches greatest importance to discussions conducted at sessions of the Forum on the Future of Democracy. Some have led to specific actions by the Council of Europe and its institutions. I recall that an initiative was taken to elaborate a Code of Good Practices for Political Parties at the Forum’s Moscow session, which also included discussions on issues such as political parties financing and electoral campaign funding.

In this respect I would like to highlight that the Council of Europe’s Group of States Against Corruption—or GRECO for short—is presently carrying out a monitoring exercise of its member-states on the funding of political parties, taking as its starting point the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation on that subject adopted in 2003. GRECO’s findings will provide a rich source for further discussion on this subject.

My Fellow Europeans,

Each one of us, in his or her own way, strives to put into practice our belief in the interdependence of democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, and human and minority rights

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I personally believe that it is in that spirit that the May 2005 Warsaw Summit of Heads of State and Government, its Declaration, and the adopted Action Plan, should be examined, together with the work of the Committee of Ministers and the various chairmanships. In fact, one of the concrete results achieved at Warsaw was the establishment of this very Forum.

Allow me then to share with you my conviction that what makes a country democratic is not the mere holding of elections. Democracy is not a value-neutral, mechanical process, but something higher. Twenty-first century democracy 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.

A democracy of substance is the grand idea of Europe. Democracy is not “the last best hope on earth,” as Abraham Lincoln defined it. In my opinion, it is something more, much more. Democracy is about equality, openness, pluralism and prosperity. Democracy is the only regime in which human beings have a chance to justly live a purposeful, noble life. And democracy is—as Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, put it in an issue paper prepared for this session of the Forum—democracy is the best form of government for the protection of human rights.



My friends,

Forming a community for a common democratic future based on shared values is our task.

This means that we understand that the future is not a gift to be received, but an achievement to be made.

It means that we respect our common European heritage—but it also means that we encourage diversity as a source of strength and a force for progressive cohesion.

It means building a democratic Europe free of division and strife, a Europe where reconciliation is a force of good, not an exercise in political correctness. Because even while it looks forward, European democracy cannot flourish without a full and open account of the past. That is why I say as Foreign Minister of the Republic of Serbia that my country is strongly committed to full and immediate cooperation with the ICTY. All indictees must be located, arrested, and extradited.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me say a few more words in my capacity as Serbia's Foreign Minister.

In my remarks so far, I have referred to the grand idea of Europe, to the notion that the values we espouse as Europeans give us the chance to build a democracy of substance—to build a form of government in which its citizens have a chance to justly live a purposeful, noble life. This achievement to come, this community of shared values—it is within our grasp. Do not let talk of democratic deficits or bureaucratic proceduralism discourage you, for those who say such things offer no alternative, and say it cannot be done.

But how can we know unless we try?

Try we must, on an issue of paramount significance for the future of Europe’s security architecture. The way we handle this issue will say much about our willingness to act according to the values we say are our own.

That issue is the future status of Kosovo and Metohija.

What does this have to do with the grand idea of Europe?

It is complicated. For as long as anyone can remember, Kosovo and Metohija has been multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional. And for as long as anyone has been paying attention, one group has dominated the others. Right now, our province’s Albanians dominate the Serbs. A few years ago, the Serbs dominated the Albanians. A few years before that, again, the Albanians dominated the Serbs. And so on and so forth—all the way back. It’s as if a social wall of separation, of prejudice, between the communities was erected many centuries ago, held together with a glue whose magic ingredient was oppression. And it is our job to tear down the wall—the final wall in Europe.

That is why this has everything to do with the grand idea of Europe.

Look at the arguments both sides are making. One side says, international law is on our side, and by the way, it is the cradle of our civilization: the province is our Jerusalem. The other side says, we are in the majority, and recent history, in which you were the villains, teaches us that we cannot live together. The first side replies by saying that the villain who persecuted you is dead, and do not forget that we overthrew his regime. Now, more than ever before, we're willing to live in peace, together, under a common sovereign roof, but we're willing to fundamentally respect your right to govern your own internal affairs.

On a personal level, I must say to you that the failure, so far, to come together and agree on a common future is a great disappointment.

Yet I feel that a window of opportunity was recently opened in Belgrade—for Serbia has formed a new majority government. This government's central strategic priority is the achievement of a European future—not only for Serbia—but for all the Western Balkans.

And Serbia believes that the opportunity to once and forever grasp the common destiny that we have always shared is due in large part to the EU membership perspective that is within the region's reach. Without this credible and clear perspective, the external incentives to reform and cooperate disappear. The Western Balkans could return to division and strife—and hatred, and war, and terrible misery. Stability would not take root, and prosperity would remain illusive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to emphasize Serbia’s determination to find a mutually acceptable, compromise solution to the question of the future status of Kosovo and Metohija—precisely because we believe so passionately in the grand idea of Europe, in the tradition of European integration, and in the European practice of reconciliation.

But I equally want to make clear that no imposed solution is sustainable, because it will become the seed of the next conflict. Additionally, an imposed solution would establish the precedent that great powers can impose their will on the internationally recognized borders of other countries.

I say to you that no solution is sustainable unless it is acceptable to all genuine stakeholders. Otherwise, a crucial piece in the security architecture of the region will be missing, and it will be irreplaceable.

I have to be frank: Europe cannot move forward on this issue without imagination, because where there is no imagination, there is no vision. Europe is the product of a vision, and of political steps achieved with patience and through consensus—informed by that very same vision. Europe goes forward boldly, but patiently.

But when it comes to Kosovo and Metohija, the right combination of boldness and deliberation just hasn't been made yet. What is needed, it seems to me, is a little more patience.

We have to find a compromise solution. We simply must get it right. It's the only way to a sustainable future for Kosovo and Metohija, for the rest of Serbia, for the Western Balkans—and in a way that I hope I have laid out for you this afternoon, for all of Europe. This solution cannot be independence.

My Fellow Europeans,

The time is now. Let us put our minds, our hearts, and our souls at work.

Patience, boldness, deliberation. These are the virtues we need to call up and make use of.

By working together, we can ensure that conflict and war in Europe never happen again.

Let's try to live up to the grand idea of Europe, the idea that only together can we make Europe truly whole, permanently free and always at peace.

Thank you for your attention.