

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Thank you, Elaine, for that truly moving introduction. After listening to your words, I feel like I've returned home after a long journey to a faraway land. In a way I guess that's actually true.

Now try to imagine that you came from half a world away, back to the place that changed your life. And that as hard as you try, you can never return to those two years which so profoundly

helped to form you—to those two years that made you into who you are today.

The fire in the hearth just doesn't crackle like it used to. But it still warms your heart and nourishes your soul like nowhere else on earth. It is home and it isn't home.

I almost sound as though I'm giving a commencement or homecoming address, don't I? I guess it's unavoidable, for I'm trying to find a way to build a bridge between my past and my present.

Those of you who are students at the Kennedy School should always try to be aware of how fortunate you are to be here. And you should try to live in the moment, to really *feel* the experience. Because when it's gone, it's gone for good. There is no going back.

But in a more profound way, Harvard will always stay with you, for the education you receive will serve as your surest signposts along the path you will chart for yourselves.

The fraternity of the mind to which you are being exposed, and the friendships you are making, will, in all likelihood, fundamentally transform you.

Thanks to the Kokkalis Foundation at the Kennedy School, I got the opportunity to learn of the importance of leaving a stamp on the world. And learned about the nobility of devoting myself to public service, to the public interest. And perhaps most importantly, I acquired a profound respect for those who will never get the chance to get a world-class education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Leaders are the shapers of the future. The Kennedy School gives you the right tools and the proper moral compass, to make the right decisions, to establish the right rules, and to reduce your doubts—as you work to ennoble the community you serve through your leadership.

Now, Harvard can't give you ability. That you have or you don't. Sure, Harvard can teach you to *harness*

your ability—and this institution can do it better than most. But that’s not what makes it unique. What makes Harvard unique—and this applies to the Kennedy School in particular—is that it gives you the tools to envisage and plan the change. And it gives you the tools to see change through, to implement your vision, to make the improbable—something even revolutionary—possible.

Standing on this very stage five years ago exactly, the engine of the democratic overthrow of the tyrant Milosevic, our assassinated prime minister Dr. Zoran Djindjic, defined leadership in the contemporary Serbian context.

On that day, Prime Minister Djindjic compared leading the drive to change Serbia to surgery. “You cannot conduct surgery without pain,” he added. And in transitions, anesthetic is seldom available. The majority will be in pain, and they will always feel it. And that means that the majority will not love you. He remarked: “If you want to be loved in difficult situations, you will miss the opportunity to do what you should do.”

To lead in difficult times means that you choose either success or popularity. Djindjic chose success, he chose to implement his vision of the future. He chose to change his country—my country. And in so doing, he became deeply unpopular.

But those who had the most to lose from his efforts—the warmongers he overthrew—felt his success. They saw around the corner of history and figured out just how popular he was destined to become.

And their agents killed him to try and keep the future from us all.

But the vision of a democratic, European and prosperous Serbia did not die with him. We’re still here, and, for the moment, we still keep winning elections. And I’ll tell you why. Because we are in the right, because history is on our side, and because we’re implementing the vision of our assassinated prime minister. Perhaps not as fast as we’d like, but we’re doing the best we can—we’re still moving forward.

And that brings me to Prime Minister Djindjic’s image of post-Milosevic Serbia as a bicycle in motion. When I was writing the remarks for today, I tried to recall what he meant exactly.

I remember he once told me that a bicycle can be stable only in movement. If you look at your pedaling feet, you lose your balance and fall down. So riding a bike requires a kind of leap of faith. You’ve got to watch the road ahead and not concentrate on your feet. Trust the laws of physics, if you will. If you “stop to move”—his term—that’s no good either. Because you won’t be moving, and that’s a tamer, less harmful version of falling down. But the effect is the same:

you don't go forward.

You have to move, and to do so successfully, you have to look ahead. You have to stay on track. You have to look to the future.

So leadership is really about seizing, harnessing the future that's coming at you. And you have to deal with it. You have to master the change that the future brings by planting trees of hope. Well, Zoran planted for Serbia. And it's our solemn duty to water those seedlings, to nurture them, and cultivate them. Anything less, and his murderers and their followers win the battle that remains: the battle for the soul of the Balkans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I arrived at Harvard in early September 2001. I walked around Cambridge a lot in those first few days, and along the Charles. I moved into my graduate apartment, purchased textbooks, made a few friends, shopped for furniture, filled the fridge. The usual.

One day, early in the semester during a class, an international student received a text message from a friend back home. He stood up, right in the middle of the seminar, and began to read it aloud.

“The twin towers have collapsed,” he exclaimed. The class burst out in disbelieving laughter. And then someone else’s phone rang, and someone else’s after that, and a silent senselessness enveloped the room. We were all so shocked. No one could think of anything to say.

Later that day, in Dunster House, someone put up what Robert Kennedy had said about democracy, and it has stayed with me ever since. “Democracy requires that we take the chances of freedom. It requires that the liberating play of reason be brought to bear on events filled with passion; that dissent be allowed to make its appeal for acceptance; that men chance error in their search for the truth.”

Well, those who planned and executed 9/11 and all other acts of terror fear the future and distrust the present. They disavow reason, believing that passion is the entryway to truth, and that the past that truly never was, is the passageway to the future that will never be. They take no chances with freedom. They murder, they hate, and they destroy.

Thankfully, in the Balkans, the scourge of terrorism is not as present as it is in some other parts of the world. Those who murdered and hated and destroyed used other means, no less despicable. *They* fell off the ladder of power the day *we* overthrew Milosevic, but they're eager to step back on. They still lurk in the shadows, plotting their own return.

But make no mistake, they will be defeated. They and their awful deeds belong to the previous century, and they will not reign in this one.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

President Boris Tadic of Serbia has said that the future will belong to those who can blend passion, reason and courage into a democratic whole. That's not easy, because the Western Balkans inherited a truly burdensome legacy. Incredibly, notwithstanding the encumbrance of this bequest, we have taken the right path: the path of democracy, the path of regional cooperation and reconciliation, the path to membership in the European Union.

As the pivot country of the Western Balkans, much depends on the success of Serbia. If we succeed, the region is almost guaranteed to follow, to the benefit of all.

But the particularity of the Western Balkans is that the success of one is accompanied by the envy of others. This means that we've all got to succeed at the same time. All the Western Balkans, together, joining the very hands that a few years ago had been at each other's throats. That is what Balkan democracy, incentivized by the promise of Europe, can produce.

What we don't have is the luxury of time. The window of opportunity won't stay open forever. We have to play catch-up. For while we descended into civil war, the rest of the continent worked to expand the sphere of peace in Europe.

That's why I have proposed that the European Union provides us with a clearer roadmap to membership for the entire region. I strongly believe that this could become the democratic glue that would bind the region's countries to one another as never before in our tumultuous history. So we can rise up together, and succeed together. And in this way contribute to the construction of a Europe truly whole, free, and at peace.

Concretely, Serbia proposes that the EU offers immediate candidate status to all the countries of the Western Balkans.

Putting such an offer on the Balkan table would fundamentally transform the political debate throughout the region. It would concretize the promise made at the EU Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, where the perspective of the Balkans in Europe was first clearly mentioned. And it would provide a safe, democratic framework within which a cooperative future could be built.

Had such a proposal been offered to the region during Djindjic’s lifetime, I think we would have already gotten to the light at the end of the tunnel to Europe. Maybe it would have even kept him alive. I don’t know. What is more certain is that we wouldn’t be facing a regional *malaise*—a

ma
laise

rooted in a profound sense that we in the Balkans lack a feeling of imminent belonging to Europe.

My Dear Friends,

This feeling is rendered more acute by the way in which the question of the future status of Kosovo and Metohija is being dealt with.

Handled the wrong way, there is a very real danger that the entire region could swell up into a wave of discontent. I would characterize this danger as the eight hundred pound gorilla—the gorilla standing beside us in the antechamber to Europe.

But it seems as though no one is cognizant of just how badly things could go. “Keep the gorilla happy, and everything will be alright in the Balkans” some might say—forgetting it seems that even a gorilla at ease can wreck havoc just by the swing of an arm.

The way forward lies not in keeping the gorilla happy, but in leading it out of the room. We must prevent now—not try to contain later—the dangerous consequences that getting Kosovo wrong could produce.

How to proceed?

Let’s be honest, I do not believe that the question of whether Kosovo receives independence or substantial autonomy makes most countries’ list of top ten foreign policy priorities. And I think that—in all frankness—the question of the survival of Serbian democracy *per se* does not make it either.

But what likely does make most top ten lists is securing an outcome that consolidates the recent democratic gains made in the Western Balkans—an outcome that secures EU membership for *all* the countries of the region—the last un-integrated corner of Europe. For that would be a strategic achievement.

So then the question becomes, how do we do that? What’s the optimal trajectory?

We do this by putting the welfare and the stability of the entire region in the center of our thinking on how to solve Kosovo the right way. No one sides with Belgrade or Pristina. Rather, everyone works together to *overcome the differences* between the parties so that all the countries of the Western Balkans get to be on the same side. The side of Europe and its democratic values.

Earlier I spoke of the particularity of the Western Balkans. The success of one is accompanied by the envy of others. Where there’s a winner, there’s a loser. And then the loser spends the next God-knows-how-many-years just waiting for the moment to right the historical wrong. That solves nothing. Quite the opposite: it just prolongs the tragedy.

So whatever the solution to Kosovo’s future status, we have to make sure no one loses. That means maximalist positions can’t be allowed to prevail.

Now, the problem comes down to this: Some in the international community have told Belgrade and Pristina that they will impose the province’s independence on Serbia and the region if we don’t come to an agreement by December 10th.

So tell me, with a set deadline and a default position that fulfills their maximalist demands, what incentive do the Kosovo Albanians have to negotiate in good faith? Why not just sit back, look engaged, wait out the clock, and stick around for the mother of all Christmas presents to be delivered at their door?

Paradoxical as it may sound, setting no firm deadlines will concentrate minds in both Belgrade and Pristina to come to a compromise, mutually-acceptable solution. One that secures the region's prosperous, democratic future inside the European Union. And one that both respects the territorial integrity of Serbia, while enabling the Kosovo Albanians to satisfy their legitimate demand for substantial self-government

Belgrade and Pristina, together with the international community, have to come together and lead the proverbial gorilla out of the room.

I say all this because imposing the independence of Kosovo on the Western Balkans is nothing other than the forcible partition of Serbia. A precedent will have been made—the precedent that says the international borders of democracies are not sacrosanct.

Serbian democracy will likely suffer a fatal, generational blow as a consequence of losing what even the tyrant Milosevic preserved. Don't forget, the terms of peace that ended the 1999 conflict, the terms of peace *imposed* by NATO on a defeated and isolated tyrant, *explicitly*

reaffirmed

my

country’s sovereignty over Kosovo.

“So what?”, someone could say, “if Serbia’s democracy is sent into a tail spin?” Well, Belgrade is the metropolitan center of the region. If Serbia falters, there is a real danger that the Western Balkans could get hurled back to the 1990s, because other borders would be called into question again.

The region could return to division and strife—and hatred, and terrible misery. Throughout the Western Balkans, stability would not take root, democracy would be undermined, and prosperity would remain illusive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Those of us in Serbia who are committed to engaging with our neighbors, with our friends, partners and allies—those of us who are struggling to consolidate the values and institutions of democracy in our country—face profound questions. Our citizens ask us, “was the 1999 NATO

intervention against Milosevic or the Serbian people? And if it was against Milosevic, then why do the democracies that say they are our friends want Serbian democracy to pay for Milosevic’s crimes?” And I have no answer to give to them.

And because there is no answer to give, Milosevic’s nationalistic inheritors could say to them, “Europe is not the way forward.” They could say, “America is not our friend.” They may even be saying, “democracy is not the solution.” And it will not be too difficult for them to portray Brussels and Washington as the imposers of national humiliation and profound injustice.

John F. Kennedy said that international relations should be conducted on the basis of “idealism without illusions.” To me, that means that all examinations of political affairs must begin by seeing them as they are, not as we would like them to be. Only by understanding the situation as it is, can we work, through prudent action, to move it in a direction more in line with our values and our interests.

So believe me when I tell you that we are under no illusions as to the difficulty of the task before us: to bring together compromise and principle, to consolidate regional democracy, security and stability.

To create a
unified Western Balkans
through peaceful means

,
a Western Balkans
moving
rapidly
toward European integration.

But the idealism is there too. It is captured perfectly by the words of Robert Kennedy upon hearing of the death of Martin Luther King. “Let us dedicate ourselves,” he said, “to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.”

It has fallen to this generation of leaders in the Western Balkans to make life in the region gentle—to secure the peace, the democratic peace with honor that has never before been made in the Western Balkans. It is up to us to succeed where so many before us have failed.

Thank you very much for your attention, and your warm welcome.