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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to be able to speak at the Faculty of Law of the oldest and most prestigious Dutch university.

The motto of Leiden University is *Praesidium Libertatis*: Bastion of Liberty. The atmosphere of

freedom of inquiry that characterized this great institution of learning from its inception in 1575 enabled great philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza to develop their enlightened ideas—ideas that have transformed the world in which we live. The debt we all owe to the liberal tradition of Leiden and other, similar institutions, is quite high. But what we can do is to attempt to live up to its founding message, so eloquently summarized by a sentence of Spinoza’s: “the highest activity a human being can attain is learning from understanding, because to understand is to be free.”

Today I'd like to share with you some of my thoughts on what it means to learn from understanding—understanding of where we find ourselves, how we got there, and how we can move to a future of greater, more secure freedom in the Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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The historical record of the world we inherited teaches us to treasure the nobility of progress, but also to guard against the excesses of revolutions. The tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century therefore serve as a constant reminder of the permanent warning that reason offers to passion, but also of the futility of reason in the face of the uncontrolled manifestation of that same passion. These tragedies teach us to stand vigilant watch over the events that shape our destiny, for vigilance is the antidote to passivity—the harbinger of injustice waiting right around the corner, searching for an opportunity to reassert itself once more in the midst of the human condition.

The habit of vigilance that is most often formed during one’s university years leads to engagement with the world—in particular the world of politics. It leads to an understanding of the importance of individual actions, of leadership, in the advancement of responsible political

choices. Vigilance teaches you to harness your abilities, better predict consequences, and guard against radical temptations to play to the crowd. For more often than not, the temptation to conduct politics on the basis of the passions produces events that impoverish not only our countries and our cultures, but our individuality as well. This temptation teaches its adherents to narrowly promote the welfare of their own, self-defined community above all others in a way that allows for the slip into extremism to occur all too easily. It does not necessarily lead to violence, but it inevitably leads to mythmaking, to political tension, and thereby prevents the fruits of peace to ripen without fear of destruction.

All this is part of the bequest we share, and it informs the way in which we view ourselves and our historical inheritance. I say all this by way of introduction to the world we live in today. A world with no simple answers and all too many complicated challenges—in a time of global transition and geopolitical earthquakes, economic transformations, social upheavals, and religious revivalism. The global speed of change is unprecedented in recorded human history. But at the end of the day, human beings still remain driven to live in political communities by the bonds of blood or history or sometimes constrained choice. They are still governed by considerations of national interest commingled with hope, aspiration, fear and honor.

This brings me to the main part of my remarks. As a student, in the 1990s, I often thought about Serbia, about the awful predicament my country was then in. We have come a long way since then. We are all witnesses to the achievements of Serbia's great democratic leap forward. But we have not yet fully gotten ourselves out of the geo-strategic hole dug in the previous decade—a hole dug in large part due to a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of leaders in Serbia and throughout the Western Balkans on the significance of the implosion of communism.

The way forward for all the stakeholders in the future prosperity of the Western Balkans is to work together on consolidating a vision acceptable to all: a just peace rooted in the respect of

international law. For peace is not merely the absence of war. It is, as Spinoza wrote, “a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, and justice.” How to secure such a peace is the strategic imperative informing my country’s regional policy approach—an approach leading to the construction of Europe whole, free, and at peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to discuss three pre-requisites to securing such a regional peace—a settlement that relegates to the dustbin of history the destructive passions of the recent past by building a rules-based, legally-sound foundation of understanding that gives each country in the Western Balkans an equal playing field upon which sustainable prosperity can be built for the generations to come.

The first pre-requisite is reconciliation. All the countries of the region—all the nations of the Western Balkans—must commit to *genuine* reconciliation.

At the heart of this commitment lies full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. For Serbia, there is no dilemma: we are dedicated to locating, arresting,

and handing-over the few Hague indictees still at-large. Over the past few years, we have demonstrated our dedication: 42 indictees have been turned over, including four former presidents, one former speaker of parliament, one former prime minister, and three former chiefs of the general staff.

Serbia understands that continuing to fully cooperate with the ICTY is not only our undeniable international obligation; it is our moral duty—to our neighbors and the world, of course, but foremost to ourselves.

It is a moral undertaking designed to demonstrate that we have internalized the values of the Europe we aim to join. Only by breaking with our recent past can true justice be served.

The moral nature of reconciliation is central to building a better Balkans, for it provides a framework through which the crimes of individuals who falsely acted in the name of their nation are to be understood. Reconciliation corrects a twisted view of the other side—a view that to some extent continues to permeate the cultures of all the nations of the Western Balkans. The view that teaches that an eye for an eye is a legitimate form of conduct against one's neighbour in times of discontent. Reconciliation is meant, therefore, to teach our children that all others have as much a right to live and work and be happy as oneself.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The second pre-requisite to securing peace in the Western Balkans is a clear roadmap to full membership in the European Union for the entire region.

I strongly believe 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.

Why together? It has to do with the particularity of the Western Balkans. Historically, the success of one nation, of one country, is accompanied by the envy of others. The passions stir up. So the way to prevent the return of uncontrolled passion in the Balkans is for the entire region to succeed at the same time.

Think back to the EU Thessaloniki Summit of 2003 and the sense of regional purpose we all felt then. The Western Balkans was at the center of European attention. No distinctions were made. We were all given a powerful pointer in the right direction. But the opportunity was not seized by all: the visionary words spoken—and the commitments made—did not translate into implementable policies.

Simply stated, after Thessaloniki, the necessary consolidation of an atmosphere of imminent belonging to Europe did not take place. Tangible benefits were not felt.

In fact, what we have now is a bureaucratic checklist designed to measure the incremental steps of progress toward membership.

Something is lacking: Today's democratic decisions in our countries are still hostage to a future with no clear European deadline. *The way forward lies in harnessing the visionary potential of the European project by offering immediate candidate status to all the countries of the Western Balkans.*

To offer immediate candidacy to the entire region does not mean providing a short-cut to membership, but rather a re-shuffling of the accession deck of cards characterized by enhanced, hands-on engagement with our region

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Putting such an offer on the Balkan table would fundamentally transform the political debate throughout the region. Our democracies would be fully consolidated. The point of no reversal would finally be traversed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The third pre-requisite to securing peace in the Western Balkans consists in overcoming the current impasse in the efforts to arrive at a truly European solution to the future status of Kosovo and Metohija.

Let me outline what I mean by a European solution before turning to the precise nature of the impasse we find ourselves in.

A European solution is one that advances the cause of Europe in all the Western Balkans. It is a solution that leaves all the region's inhabitants better off than they are now. It is a solution that firmly roots itself in the interwoven fabric of European values such as democracy, rule of law, human and minority rights, and toleration of differences—values that are put into practice through the implementation of bold, imaginative political steps achieved with vision, patience,



dialogue, compromise, concession, and consensus-building.

That is how the European Union became the political form that best secures equality, inclusiveness, pluralism and prosperity.

By working together to solve Kosovo's future status in a European manner, on the basis of European values, and using European ways of problem solving, we can create, at long last, a European solution to Kosovo's future status and save democracy in the Western Balkans.

Such a solution is within our grasp: for as President Tadic of Serbia recently put it, the European principle of subsidiarity provides the solution to the age-old tension between the communal and the sovereign

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And yet, we have come to an impasse. The reason has to do with the imposition of hard deadlines on the negotiations process. Let me tell you why.

Imposing artificial deadlines on negotiations undermines the view that there is nothing more important than reaching an agreement acceptable to all.

The reason is elementary. As you know, December 10<sup>th</sup> has been set as a deadline. And some key participants in the process are telling Belgrade and Pristina that Kosovo’s independence will be imposed if no agreement is reached by then—a very un-European course of action leading to an outcome that is really no solution at all. For it promotes the interests of one side: the Kosovo Albanians. Put yourself in their shoes: with a set deadline and a default position that fulfils its maximalist demands, what incentive does Pristina have to negotiate in good faith? Why not just sit back, appear engaged, and simply wait out the clock?

The way out of this looming crisis lies in viewing the December 10<sup>th</sup> deadline as a marker for assessing progress, and nothing more. By re-defining the significance of this date, the impasse will have been overcome. For an environment would be created—for the first time—in which an historical settlement can be crafted. It is the only way to avoid freezing this conflict—the only way to prevent creating a victor and a vanquished in a region where the loser spends the next generation plotting revenge on the winner. It’s the only way to overcome the spiral of violence, and to once and for all bring Serbs and Albanians together under the banner of Europe.

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Notwithstanding the impasse created by the December 10<sup>th</sup> deadline, Serbia has continued to pro-actively engage in the negotiation process. We believe that a European solution to Kosovo’s future status lies in constructing a uniquely crafted partnership for the future under one common sovereign roof. An edifice so constructed could have more than one entrance, but as I’m sure you understand, a common sovereign roof can’t be built over two separate buildings.

That is why Serbia has offered institutionally unrestrained autonomy—extraordinarily broad powers of self-governance—to the Kosovo Albanians, that at the same time preserves our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to end my remarks by a brief discussion of why imposing independence would fatally undermine the legal foundation of the international system as we know it.

The international system is predicated on the observance of a set of rules—rules meant to maintain predictability of action: the foundation of international stability. One of the most important set of rules—the bedrock upon which everything else has been built since 1945—is the United Nations Charter. And in Europe, the UN Charter has been augmented by the Helsinki Final Act. Both explicitly reaffirm the inviolability of internationally-recognized borders, while making reference to self-determination that cannot in good conscience be transformed into a right of secession.

Having this in mind, it follows that recognizing Kosovo’s independence against the will of Serbia would mean recognizing the legitimacy of its forcible partition. And that would set an immediate precedent, for it would mean recognizing the legitimacy of partitioning *any* country against its will. And, even worse, it would mean that something like this could be done by circumventing the Security Council—for the Security Council won’t verify Kosovo’s independence.

The forcible partition of an internationally-recognized state—a blatant violation of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act—would, it is safe to say, clearly pose a fundamental danger to the international system itself, and to relations between states around the world.

I think you will all agree that the price to pay for imposing a maximalist solution to an ethnic conflict in Europe is much too high. We must do what is necessary to prevent the onset of such a dangerous precedent that makes everyone worse off than they are today.

It’s no longer just an issue of securing peace in the Western Balkans. It’s about preserving the international system as we have known it since 1945. And it’s about preventing the potential declarations of independence of dozens of other breakaway regions throughout the world in the time to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have made reference to Spinoza—the first philosopher to argue that democracy is the best form of government—twice already. And by way of a conclusion I would like to make use of his words a third time. “There is no hope unmingled with fear,” he said, “and no fear unmingled with hope.” This is particularly true in the Western Balkans. That is why for us especially, a European solution can act as the adhesive that fastens fear to hope, together with courage, reason, and passion, into a democratic whole that secures our future once and for all—a European future, a future free of strife and conflict, division and mistrust, hatred and misery.

Anything less would set us back yet another generation, creating an even greater chasm between the Balkans and the European Union. Let us find the will to forge a European solution that advances the regional accession prospects of the *entire region*. A solution that promotes the consolidation of democratic values and institutions. A solution that advances the economic transformation of the Western Balkans, the security architecture of all of Europe, and the stability of the international system.

Thank you for your attention.