

Thursday, 06 November 2008.

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Deputy Prime Minister Djelic,

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by singling out the leadership of Mrs. Sonja Licht and the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence in advancing the cause, reputation and quality of the civil society sector in Serbia. Your many years of selfless service to our country and the entire region immeasurably helped us overcome the tumults of the 1990s and, in the wake of October 5th, greatly facilitated the development of our democracy. We all owe you a debt of gratitude. Thank you very much.

We come together to discuss how to strengthen Serbia’s European perspective at a particularly delicate moment. A new geopolitical reality is emerging—and it is happening in ways and with a tempo few thought possible even a short while ago.

We use different terms to define it: the neo-polar world, the era of overlapping systems, the age of relative powers. But it all basically means the same thing: growing inter-dependence, increasing unpredictability, and accelerating tectonic shifts; greater challenges combined with new opportunities.

There are many reasons for all this, from climate change and terrorism, to the slowdown in democratic development and the easterly drift of the global balance of power. The recent tumults in financial markets—from New York and London, to Moscow and Hong Kong—have only made matters worse.

As a result of all this, trans-national friendships are shifting, as interests diverge and comprehensive alternatives are postulated. Many nations are re-defining their strategic priorities. Something like a sense of acute uncertainty about the future is being felt throughout the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One geo-strategic theatre that is uniquely affected by the unforeseen global changes of 2008 is Europe.

I say “uniquely affected” because Europe not only has to respond to external political and

economic convulsions; it has to respond to singularly complicated internal developments as well. The European Union is not a nation-state like Japan, or a confederation like Switzerland. Neither is it an experiment in representative democracy like the United States that Alexis de Tocqueville so brilliantly described. The EU is a new political form, in which a growing number of established democratic countries freely pool their sovereignty to create something novel and untested: an entity that is more than an alliance, and less than a country.

Of course, there is no doubt that 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. In short, 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 Europeans are becoming all too familiar with.

What makes the present moment particularly challenging for the European Union is the tight convergence of these and many other factors in very arduous times. It is not my intention to discuss ways out of this quagmire this morning, but rather to focus on its impending effects on the Western Balkans.

There is a danger that our region ends up a casualty of the inopportune state of affairs facing the European Union. And standing at the center of the Western Balkans is this country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Serbia, the year 2008 will be remembered as a very, very difficult one as well. We too have felt the aftershocks of the global economic turndown. More profoundly, we have become caught at the heart of one of the most dangerous challenges to the nature of the international system since the founding of the United Nations.

I speak of the February 17th unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija—an act that is in direct violation of our Constitution, the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Anchored by the results of two historic elections that confirmed our determination to move towards Europe, the Republic of Serbia responded to this grave crisis—to this attempt at forcible partition—with maximal restraint. We 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.

We sought a non-confrontational way to respond to UDI. And we found it. Working to overcome this political assault on our sovereignty and territorial integrity, we demanded that justice be

delivered through the proper legal means at the disposal of any member State of the United Nations. We chose to use the law.

We asked the General Assembly to refer the issue of the legality of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence to the International Court of Justice—and the General Assembly did just that, this past October 8th.

The result is that for the first time in the history of our region, an issue of such fundamental importance and complexity—passionately involving all at once identity, boundaries, communal rights, opposing historical narratives—has been steered clear of resorting to the force of arms.

Relegating the status issue to the international judicial arena is but the first in a series of steps designed to create an environment in which lasting peace and stability can be secured.

The second has to do with restoring legitimacy to international action.

The framework for the status-neutral administration of our southern province remains resolution 1244 (1999). Any attempt to change this legal fact without the approval of the Security Council threatens to pull us back into the orbit of a very dangerous foreign policy doctrine that I hope was put to rest by the voters of America just a few days ago.

Its unpopularity became universal—and its danger to world peace, almost self-evident. Yet there are some who still believe it can lead to success in Kosovo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

International missions that operate without the consent of the Security Council have become known as “coalitions of the willing.”

Those that are “willing” oppose themselves to those that are “unwilling.” At least in the Balkans, it has been proven to be a recipe for disaster.

In the period of time since the ICJ was given the task of issuing an advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo’s UDI, Serbia has re-doubled its efforts to ensure that this doctrine will no longer have a voice—at least on our regional stage.

That is why we have engaged in a dialogue with the United Nations on the reconfiguration of the international civilian presence in our southern province. We are close to arriving at an agreement that can be confirmed by the Security Council.

Should we fail, we may face a series of dangerous, uncoordinated outcomes on the ground. And, more broadly, the re-embrace of a rules-based system to frame conduct in the 21st-century international arena would not be secured.

I say: it is time to set aside once and for all the outdated, zero-sum approach to regional politics in which a winner and a loser insecurely emerge from each dispute—the winner because he feels unable to secure his triumph, the loser because he feels he must avenge the defeat he believes to have been unjust.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia is a country proud of its history. Our democratic leadership is completely dedicated to pursuing policies that will propel the region generationally forward. That is 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.

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

This is the third step in the creation of lasting peace and stability in the region: by choosing—as democracies—to belong to something that is greater than the sum of its parts, the Balkanization of the Balkans can be reversed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

How to achieve this is the overarching theme of this conference. What I would like to do is frame this theme in a broader context. And I’m afraid that the forward linear trajectory we all had hoped to see become a reality in the near future could turn out to be less likely to come into being than we might wish.

I still believe, however, that we have grounds for cautious optimism. If we work together—if all the stakeholders in the success to come act in concert, then not only can we maintain our pace, but we can all get to the finish line faster than anyone thinks is possible.

I don’t believe there is anyone in this room who hasn’t repeated the mantra that Serbia’s place is in the European Union—who hasn’t said in the course of his or her conversations that all the countries of the Western Balkans must join the EU.

But rarely does one take a serious look at the strategic framework informing the promise made

at the Thessaloniki Summit of 2003, where the European future of the Western Balkans was first clearly stated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Western Balkans is the only place where EU enlargement *can* take place, realistically, in this generation. There may be others, but the integration of *those* geographies is, for various causes, pretty far off.

Now, the Western Balkans has two geographical edges: Croatia and Turkey. For a number of reasons we are all familiar with, it seems pretty safe to assume that Croatia is in, and Turkey is out—at least in *this* generation. Long term, who knows? But as Keynes used to say, in the long term, we’re all dead.

In my view, what happens to the countries in-between Croatia and Turkey primarily depends on the direction in which Serbia will end up walking towards.

We are a country uniquely placed to act as the region’s accession accelerator. And I think there is no doubt that Serbia’s success would ensure the irreversibility of the transformative processes that have the potential to inject our corner of Europe with such vitality, economic development, and hope for a secure future.

And I think there is equally no doubt that without Serbia leading the way, places like Bosnia, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia will not be able to truly consolidate their European futures—should they end up being offered, in the absence of a concrete proposal of membership to Serbia.

The question then is: will Serbia gravitate towards Croatia, or Turkey—will we enter the House of Europe, or will we remain bitterly at its gates? This is the fundamental question. And I want to spend the remaining portion of my time with you this morning exploring various aspects of this issue—which is, in my view, the fourth and final step in the creation of lasting peace and stability in the Western Balkans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying clearly that never in the history of Serbia have we had a more pro-European government than that of Boris Tadic. Never have we been in a better position to deliver on our commitments and our promises. Never have we been more able to commence the sprint to the finish line of Europe.

And why have we not done so? Why are we not closer? Why is there a sense that an opportunity is about to be missed—the best regional opportunity ever to come along?

My answer is because Serbia is, unfortunately, not being treated like other EU membership aspirants in the Western Balkans. We seem to be held to a different set of standards.

Don't you just get the feeling that when the EU looks to Serbia, it says: *sui generis*? It's not just the Copenhagen criteria, is it?

First we had the additional constraint of a very harshly conceived definition of full cooperation with the ICTY, where more recently full compliance has come to mean delivering Mladic—even

if there is no hard evidence whatsoever that he is currently in Serbia. And then, after incredible external pressure was put on our neighbors to recognize Kosovo’s UDI— creating *new* regional fissures—we are asked to pretend that everything is business as usual. And now, some even try to insinuate that Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo should be yet another pre-condition for candidacy status.

The time has come to say: “enough is enough.”

Yes, Serbia does face a unique set of challenges—and believe me, we’re very much aware of them. But instead of helping us overcome them, it looks like some are creating new obstacles for us to jump over.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If you take one thing away from this speech, I would like it to be that Serbia demands to be treated like any other Thessaloniki aspirant.

I think we deserve it. And if we get it, I think we can make it. And I think we can make it in record time.

So here is what I propose.

Let us get rid of the extra conditionality, and un-freeze the Interim Agreement by the end of this year.

Let us make 2009 the year that Serbia is put on the White Schengen List, and the year we achieve Official Candidacy Status.

Let’s just do those three things—together, as partners aiming at a common future. I tell you: Serbia will do its part. And I tell you also: release us from out-of-date perceptions, and watch just how fast we can go.

The point of no return is within reach. Let us have the courage, and the vision, to make it happen. Right now.

Thank you for your attention.