

Remarks to the Belgrade Conference of

Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe

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Belgrade

3 November 2007

Mrs. Licht,

Director General Laurens,

Ambassador Veijalainen,

Dear Graduates,

Honored Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased by the fact that the six-month Serbian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has included this conference as a part of its myriad activities.

The theme of this conference is regional cooperation and its opportunities and challenges. As you know, this theme is one of the priorities of the Serbian Chairmanship. Formed under the umbrella of advancing the core values of Europe—to which I will turn in a moment—regional groupings tend to be oriented towards the advancement of tangible political, economic, cultural and security interests. They enable its members to strengthen cross-border cooperation while at the same time help to promote better understanding among the nations concerned. In Southeast Europe, regional groupings have at least two additional benefits. They contribute to

the process of reconciliation, and they further encourage the region's accession drive to the European Union.

Why is EU membership so vital to the future prosperity of Southeast Europe? Of course, the material benefits are crucial. But I do not wish to dwell on them, because they are very well known to all of us. For Serbia and the rest of Southeast Europe, I believe that the true attraction lies in the recognition that internalizing the “grand idea of Europe” is of crucial civilizational importance. Let us turn to the historical record for a moment. The bedrock belief that democracy is interdependent with individual liberty, the rule of law, and human rights came to light in the post-war reconciliation between France and Germany, and, more broadly, in the reconciliation of all European nations and states with one another. From its inception, joining the institutions of Europe has in effect meant renouncing war as a tool of statecraft in the European space. That is why Europe is so aptly termed the reconciler of nations.

In post-conflict and post-communist societies such as Southeast Europe, the march toward European integration enables all the region's countries to implement true, genuine reconciliation.

Reconciliation is both an end in itself, and an instrument for the achievement of something more.

It is an end in itself because it corrects a twisted, false view of the other side—a view that to

some extent continues to permeate the cultures of all the nations of Southeast Europe.

This view teaches that an eye for an eye is a legitimate form of conduct against one's neighbours 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.

It is also a moral undertaking whose completion will be a clear-cut demonstration that we have internalized the “grand idea of Europe”—this progressive constellation of values that constitute the foundation of the Europe we aim to join. Additionally, reconciliation is about telling the truth—the unadorned, factual, horrible truth of the bloodshed that must never return to our lands.

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.

Lastly, reconciliation empowers us to have confidence in the safety of building networks of democratic transitional experience—so that we can all get to the future faster. The sixteen schools of Political Studies gathered under the auspices of the Council of Europe play an important role in strengthening the ties that are binding us to one another as never before in the tumultuous history of this region and beyond. Allow me to single out the leadership of Mrs. Sonja Licht and the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence in advancing regional reconciliation

and education efforts. We all owe you a debt of gratitude. Thank you very much.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Southeast Europe has accomplished much over the past few years. We are all witnesses to the achievements of the region's democratic leap forward. Yet one major obstacle remains to the consolidation of our gains. That obstacle is the future status of Kosovo. For the past few months, Belgrade and Pristina have been engaged in a process, facilitated by the Contact Group Troika, meant to determine what it will be. How future status is resolved will determine the course of Southeast Europe.

We are at a crossroads. Should the status process lead to a negotiated solution that enhances the region's EU prospects, or should it promote an outcome that sides with the nationalist pretensions of one side? Will the region become part of the European solution, or remain a Balkan problem? Do we push for a compromise solution rooted in the values of Europe, or do we favour an outcome that rewards a maximalist approach founded on an implicit threat of violence? Do we re-embrace the exclusionary past or boldly build toward a common future?

If we do it right, Serbia will succeed. And if we succeed, the rest of the Western Balkans is virtually guaranteed to be propelled forward.

The question then becomes, how exactly do we solve Kosovo’s future status? What is, in other words, the framework of the settlement?

It’s pretty straightforward. The settlement must fully conform to the principles of international law enshrined in documents such as the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. The settlement must also recognize the legitimate right of Kosovo’s Albanian community to autonomously administer their own affairs.

This is why Serbia is committed to extending extraordinarily broad powers of self-governance to the Kosovo Albanians. We offer institutionally unrestrained autonomy that at the same time preserves our territorial integrity.

In short, Belgrade proposes to Pristina 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.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regrettably, too little progress in the negotiations has been made so far. The reason is not difficult to understand. The Troika has set December 10th as a deadline for the successful completion of the talks. And some key participants in the process are telling both sides that Kosovo's independence will be imposed on the parties if no agreement is reached by then—a very un-European course of action.

Unfortunately, it happens to be music to the ears of the Pristina negotiators. With a set deadline and a default position that fulfills their maximalist demands, what incentive do they 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 *not* imposing hard deadlines on the negotiation process. By viewing the December 10th deadline as a marker for assessing progress—and by embracing the view that there is nothing more important than reaching an agreement acceptable to all—we would create, for the first time, an environment in which an historical settlement can be crafted. It's 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—the reconciler of nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The clear task before all the parties to the Kosovo challenge is to work together and build an edifice of *regional* peace on a solid, European foundation—a foundation constructed with the contemporary tools of trust and cooperation, patience and compromise, consensus and creativity.

This is the opportunity before us—the opportunity to live together in peace, security and prosperity.

The challenge is making proper use of the courage of our convictions—convictions rooted in the values of Europe—instead of giving into the nationalist passions that have brought so much misery to this continent.

I believe we can succeed, because I believe in the power of the values of Europe to overcome hatred, division and mistrust. We must succeed, because none of us want this region to turn its back on the future that beckons. We must believe that when justice and force compete in the Europe of the 21st century, justice wins out. We must believe success is possible because we have all lived through the consequences of the victory of force. And none of us want our country and the region to return to the darkness of the 1990s.

Thank you very much for your attention.