

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

Moscow, 23 November 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honored to be able to address the future diplomatic elite of the Russian Federation—the first time this has been done in the long history of friendship between our two countries. Support of the Russian people for their South Slavic cousins is so well known that it hardly needs to be mentioned. And so I want to express my genuine satisfaction with the fact that the longstanding tradition of closeness between our two nations continues to grow and to deepen in the present.

I want to dwell for a moment on the origin of the special relationship between our two nations. It

is intimately tied to the origins of the Serbian state, and I feel it proper to begin my address by sharing with you the little that I know about it.

The first genuine ruler of the Serbian people, **Grand Duke** Stefan Nemanja, gave his nation three sons. At the age of eighteen, in the year 1193, the youngest son, Rastko, came into contact with a monk from the Holy Mountain of Athos. Worldly knowledge, authority and possessions could not compare to the exalted experience felt by the young Serbian prince in conversation with this simple monk, who, it so happens, was Russian. And so, together, they left the Serbian lands for the monastic community of Athos—for the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon, to be precise, where Rastko chose to devote his life to the service of God. Unprecedented in its rapidity, the Russian abbot of the monastery tonsured young Prince Rastko as a monk the very next day, and gave him the name Sava—the trigger event that enabled him to introduce into the Serbian national consciousness the central place of the Serbian Orthodox Church he went on to found.

The events of Sava’s life—indeed, his leadership and vision—are of central importance for the Serbian people. And who knows whether any of this would have happened without that seemingly chance visit of an unknown Russian monk to a prince of Serbia. It is, in a way, the origin of the special relationship between our two nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years after Sava was tonsured, his father, the **Grand Duke**, abdicated, and, acceding to his son’s wishes, took the monastic rites, joining him on the Holy Mountain soon thereafter. There, father and son—the two builders—were once more together: the builder of the state, and the builder of its soul.

After his father’s death, Sava was called, on several occasions, to intervene in the political affairs of the lands his brothers had inherited from their departed father. It was hard work, yet his political successes created a realm of national stability that enabled the Serbian people to establish a kingdom for close to 200 years, until their military defeat by the Ottomans at Kosovo in 1389—and then, after 1804 and our Uprising against the occupiers, to once more begin building a sovereign state on the foundations of the Medieval one.

But Sava’s deeds did more than that. For they established an almost primordial confidence in the ability of our nation to survive against all odds, by instilling a memory of the founding of Serbia that subtly fused the material to the spiritual, the past to the future, the changing and the permanent, the human and the divine. Consider Saint Sava’s words: “Faith can only save us if united with, and expressed in, good works.”

It is no accident, therefore, that the precise spot in Belgrade on which his holy relics were burned by the Ottomans on Good Friday, in 1595, is now the sight of the almost completed Cathedral dedicated to Saint Sava. Addressing the assembled in *this* city’s Christ the Savior Cathedral a few years ago on the occasion of a fund-raising event for *our*

Cathedral, President Boris Tadic of Serbia spoke of the hundred year quest to build the ultimate memorial for the holiest of Serbian saints, for the first Serbian builder. The President said, “history shows us that the Cathedral’s construction always ceased when Serbia’s own

construction ceased. Always when the Cathedral was rising, Serbia too was rising. Now, its construction is happily coming to an end, thanks in part to the generosity of the Russian people. And when it is completed, the Cathedral will nevertheless continue to rise, for it will continue to build

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up—it will continue to fulfill the missions of our founders.”

I believe that this dignified combination of faith and good works is the essence of the Orthodox Slavic soul. It unites our two nations—Serbian and Russian—in a common culture that is more than an amalgamation of traditions. It is something visceral, emotional, instinctive, *fundamental*—a sensibility that shapes the personality, and binds that person to a particular nation and a place in a way very difficult to rationalize fully.

In my view, the core of the Slavic soul is contained in the principle of *sabornost*, the notion that each individual freely unites with others in the pursuit of truth.

Sabornost

is not achieved by a majority that can be broken down in their simple individuality, but rather through a unity that is not easily measurable. Expressed politically, this unity is what the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau called “the general will”, cemented by a “social contract” that establishes the state, the embodiment of the unified sovereignty of a nation. What is desirable is willed by each thinking in terms of the whole—thus transforming the nation into a sovereign political community, with a citizenry in which each member enjoys equally, and thus democratically, the benefits of conduct he himself willed into being through the establishment of a state, its constitution, and its national legislation.

Today, our nations place centrality in the notion of the defense of our existing borders—borders which symbolize the permanence of the expression of our *sabornost*. In our view, if I may put it this way, sovereignty is both a political and moral unity which cannot be divided against the

consent of the general will, of the democratic unity of the nation, without, quite simply, destroying it in its essence.

That is why the 1990s were so traumatic for us: forces in conflict with the general will of our nations, tore down much of what our ancestors had painstakingly built over the course of centuries. Some of these forces came from within our midst, such as Slobodan Milosevic, in the case of Serbia. He brought great shame to the Serbian people, and his name will always be associated with a national disgrace.

But that is also why the 21st century opens up the possibility of national democratic renewal, founded on the basis of a valiant pride in our historical experience, and a prudent, realistic assessment of the hard work that needs to be done for our vision of ourselves as mature, sovereign democracies, to become a reality.

For the 21st century marks the return of multipolarity to the international system. Today, the multipolar world is being built on the foundations of the United Nations system that arose as a result of the epochal victory against Fascism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my view, the tectonic shifts in the global balance of power that are just around the corner must be managed by rules meant to maintain predictability of action, the foundation of international order and stability.

For we can build a prosperous future for *all* nations only by granting to each one the right to sovereign development. As Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad has said, “we must attain a situation in which all nations can live freely in accordance with their choice, while the international system will respect this choice and not try to impose any other one, and will develop laws and take such decisions that will be equally acceptable to different nations and different models of civilization.”

In practical terms, this means that the United Nations must remain the ultimate enforcer of international law, and the Security Council the only inter-governmental body that can sanction the legitimate use of force. Sometimes it may be a slow and messy process. But I strongly believe that patience and negotiations are much more attractive an alternative to anarchy and arbitrary conduct.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Unfortunately, the basic principles of international law are increasingly being brought into question. More and more, the resolution of a growing number of challenges affecting the international system are attempted to be addressed on the basis of pure political expediency, given a snapshot state of affairs. But recent experience shows that unilateral actions have not resolved any problems. On the contrary, they have exacerbated existing, and even caused additional human tragedies, creating new focal points of tension.

I agree with Russia’s view that this is extremely dangerous, because, as President Putin has explained, “it results in the fact that no one feels safe”—undermining as it does the architecture of 21st-century global security.

This brings me to the issue of the future status of Serbian’s southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Kosovo is a place of tremendous importance for Serbia. It is closely associated with the resilience of the Serbian nation. It is the beating heart of our culture, of our civilization. It is the location of many of our holiest monasteries, and the land where hundreds of thousands of Serbs breathed their last breaths.

Let me tell you an anecdote by way of illustration. When the Serbian Army was forced to retreat *en masse* across Kosovo and into Albania as a result of a combined German and Austrian offensive in the winter of 1915, they found it tactically necessary to traverse the very plain on which the battle against the Ottomans had taken place in 1389. Now, for us, this soil truly is hallowed ground—our Jerusalem. Well, this exhausted army, led by our ailing, seventy-two year old king, Peter the First, took off its boots, and walked silently across the frozen field, in quiet respect for our fallen ancestors who lie buried in unmarked graves for kilometers in every direction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In June 1999, the terms of peace *imposed* by the victors on an unpopular, defeated and internationally isolated regime, *explicitly reaffirmed* my country’s sovereignty over Kosovo, while giving the United Nations a mandate to administer the province’s internal affairs, as is plain from the text of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Contrast that with what some are telling us at present. They say they will impose the province’s independence on us if we don’t come to an agreement with the Kosovo Albanians by December 10th, an arbitrary and artificial deadline that plays into the hands of their secessionist demands. As a result, the Kosovo Albanians have little incentive to negotiate with us in good faith, calculating that all they have to do is sit back, appear engaged, and count the days to the imposition of independence.

And they say they will do so without the sanction of the Security Council, for they know that at least one permanent member of the Council—the Russian Federation—is strongly opposed to the forcible partition of Serbia, which is what the imposition of Kosovo’s independence against the sovereign will of the Serbian nation amounts to.

Such a disregard for the rules of the international system would set a dangerous precedent that opens the way for any country to be partitioned without its consent.

And we all know that there are dozens of Kosovo-s throughout the world, just waiting for sovereignty to be undermined and secession to be rendered an acceptable norm. Throughout the world, existing conflicts could escalate, frozen conflicts could reignite, and new ones could be instigated. This cannot be in the interest of a secure international system that we are working to consolidate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to express to you my deep appreciation for supporting Serbia’s commitment to reaching a negotiated, mutually-acceptable solution to Kosovo’s future status.

And I want to thank you for believing in our fair offer to the Kosovo Albanians. This offer consists in a uniquely crafted partnership under a common sovereign roof: institutionally unrestrained autonomy—extraordinarily broad powers of self-governance—that at the same time preserves our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We believe that such a compromise solution is the only way to consolidate the tremendous gains that have been made in Serbia and throughout the Western Balkans in the years since the October 2000 peaceful transfer of power from the Milosevic regime to a democratically accountable Serbian government. It is the only way to secure a lasting Balkan peace.

And we believe that this is the only way to accelerate the region’s drive toward full European Union membership.

This brings me to my next point. Since the EU Thessaloniki Summit of 2003, Brussels has opened the door for the the future of the Western Balkans in the European Union. Serbia believes this is her destiny, and has worked hard to make the promise made in Thessaloniki a reality. But the fundamental question of Kosovo’s future status is severely challenging Serbia’s

democratic capacity to sustain the reforms that are required for our membership prospect to become actual.

For when it comes to Kosovo, some in Europe seem to pass over the fact that the very imposition of Kosovo’s independence is breaking the very rules that govern the decision-making within European Union.

What are the rules that govern decision-making in the European Union? They are remarkably similar to the rules that we believe are essential to the smooth functioning of a stable international system. I refer in particular to those that place emphasis on compromise, building consensus, and bridging differences through a process of deliberate, patient, and sustained negotiations. But unfortunately, there is a tendency to view the Kosovo future status process through the lens of political expediency. This is very dangerous, for it has strengthened those within Serbia who are skeptical of our European perspective—doing damage not only to Serbia’s future, but to that of the Western Balkans as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that if we concentrate our minds on the notion that achieving a solution that is acceptable to all is much more important than meeting an artificial deadline, then I believe that we can successfully complete negotiations on Kosovo’s future status.

This would open the way for the accelerated accession to the European Union for all the Western Balkans, including Serbia—the region’s pivotal power. I want to emphasize my belief that our European accession will give a new meaning to Serbia’s special relationship with Russia. Not only would it ensure that Moscow would have a true friend in Brussels, and deepen your country’s access to the common European market, but it would also lead to an increase in both understanding and cooperation between Russia and the Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude with the text of a letter Saint Sava wrote shortly before he returned to God. “At first we were confused. The East thought that we were the West, while the West thought we were the East. Some of us misunderstood our place in the clash of currents, so they cried that we belong to neither side, while others cried that we belong exclusively to one side or the other. But I say that we are destined to be the East in the West, and the West in the East.”

This is the predicament our two nations share. As Dostoevsky wrote, “We Russians have two fatherlands: Russia and Europe.” It is indeed a complicated predicament, but one that does not have to lead to tension in the Slavic soul. On the contrary. It can lead to a new sort of *sabornost*, one rooted in the unparalleled advantages this century has to offer to all nations willing to embrace its incredible opportunities.

For I believe that if we continue working together on a whole host of issues, we can come to realize our place in the “clash of currents”, as Sava termed the human condition. I believe that we can do so in a way that preserves our democratic sovereignty while engaging the 21st century and its infinite possibilities. I believe we can further benefit from the globalizing economy. And I believe we can help shape a world that can provide a future for our children whose grandeur and goodness we will scarcely be able to recognize.

Whatever destiny lies in wait for our two nations, I am confident that we will flourish in the succession of the ages to come, in the fame that waits on the noble deeds our descendants will perform.

Thank you again for the warmth of your reception, the authenticity of your solidarity, and the strength of your friendship. Thank you, and God bless.