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Mr. Chairman,

Secretary General Insulza,

Dear Colleagues,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct privilege to participate in the dialogue between the heads of delegations and permanent observers to the Organization of American States.

I wish to indicate my sincere appreciation to our Colombian hosts for their excellent organization and warm hospitality in the city of Medellín on the occasion of the Thirty-eighth Regular Session of the OAS.

As an observer country, the Republic of Serbia has consistently held the view that this Organization plays a crucial role in the promotion of regional peace and security, through a principled defense and promotion of democratic values and institutions, human and minority rights, social justice, environmental protection, gender equality and sustainable development.

The principles that embody the OAS trace their foundation back to at least 1826 and Simón Bolívar's dream of creating an association of sovereign states in the hemisphere. "The freedom of the New World is the hope of the Universe", he said, with characteristic aplomb.

This Bolivarian hope, this quest for freedom, and this dream of establishing an inter-American system in which each sovereign state is equal to the others, assumed more concrete form with the 1948 adoption in Bogota of the Charter of the Organization of American States and the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the first international expression of the universal principles of human rights.

In the intervening decades, the OAS has grown into a regional organization that places democracy at the cornerstone of its mission. As the landmark Inter-American Democratic Charter—adopted on a date weighty of significance, September 11th, 2001—plainly declares: “The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a country firmly pursuing the path to membership in the European Union and the values that stand at its foundation, the Republic of Serbia shares your commitment to the centrality of democracy. We too believe that it is the indispensable ingredient to the achievement of stability, peace, and security in our region. And we express solidarity with your conviction that democracy is not the mere holding of elections. It is about the effective exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights in their universality, indivisibility, and interdependence.

And democracy is about the eradication of all forms of discrimination. It is about social and economic development, good governance, the rule of law, and reconciliation. It is about the promotion of civil society, and the fight to eliminate poverty. It is about multidimensional security. And it is about planning for the future by placing critical emphasis on the importance of providing a good education for the generations to come.

In short, democracy is about substance, not just procedures. It is about institutions, not just words on parchment. And it is about responsibilities, not just rights.

Democracy is a heavy burden for each to bear. But it has become indispensable to our identity. As a founder of *modernismo* once wrote, “there is no burden heavier than that of a conscious life.”

In this consists the heavy burden—and the nobility—of democracy: experiencing every fulfilling moment of our conscious existence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with a great sense of pleasure that I am able to recall the historically close and friendly ties that my country maintained with the OAS and its member-states for decades.

And it is with even greater delight that I am able to announce to you that the Republic of Serbia is in the process of prioritizing the comprehensive enhancement of our relations with the Western Hemisphere. Strengthening the already built bridges of understanding, mutual-respect and solidarity are not only in the common interest, but will serve our peoples far into the future.

That is what this Session of the OAS is fundamentally about: providing for the next generation—as the Summit’s central theme announces: “Youth and Democratic Values.” My country fully endorses the position that the heightened development of values, capacities, and skills for youth will enable them to play a constructive political role in the globalizing socio-economic context of our contemporary democratic environment, help direct their expectations, and make them aware of the challenges they will face in an era pregnant with both possibilities and uncertainties.

It is to this future that I wish to direct the remainder of my brief remarks—to the future of my country and the Western Balkan region of Europe to which we belong. For as Pablo Neruda once exclaimed, “all paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are a proud, European nation whose history is a unique combination of suffering and redemption, loss and victory, setback and jubilation.

We are a nation that has struggled to overcome five hundred years of Ottoman occupation and the consequences of too many wars.

We are a nation that has acknowledged the mistakes we have made while working to consolidate our democratic achievements.

We are a nation that stands tall as a central pillar of regional stability and prosperity.

That is what we are—a nation that seeks the guidance of our traditions while looking to the future with “burning patience”, as one of our poets termed it.

And that future is in Europe.

Serbia has an appointment to keep with Europe.

And we intend to keep it.

Yet there remains a potential obstacle on the road to Europe which, if not dealt with in the right way, could slow or even reverse the tremendous progress that has been made throughout the Western Balkans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I refer to the February 17th unilateral declaration of independence—or UDI—by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Kosovo's illegal attempt at secession has struck at the very heart of the binding principles of the international system enumerated in the Charters of the United Nations and regional organizations including the OAS—principles such as the respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

As a result, a precedent with global reach is being established—one that legitimizes the forced partition of any member-state of the United Nations, by supplying any ethnic or religious group with a grievance against its capital with a playbook on how to achieve its ends.

This precedent also legitimizes unilaterally imposing solutions to ethnic conflicts. It legitimizes the act of unilateral secession by sub-state actor. It transforms the right to self-determination into an avowed right to independence. And it violates the commitment to the peaceful and consensual resolution of disputes in Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Serbia has ruled out the use of force, in line with our commitment to the peaceful resolution of Kosovo's future status, and the values of the EU we are on course to join.

Instead, we will continue to make full use of our diplomatic, political and legal arsenal. To that end, Serbia intends to put a resolution before the General Assembly of the United Nations in September that would ask the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence.

We are aware that you have been given advice to recognize Kosovo—and in the name of the Republic of Serbia, I wish to profoundly thank the vast majority of you for your principled position not to do so.

My friends, your support for Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity is truly gratifying. Informed by your deep respect for the principles of international law, you have examined the strategic consequences for the United Nations system of Kosovo's UDI.

You have looked at the Kosovo precedent, and have judged its potential consequences: existing conflicts could escalate, frozen conflicts could reignite, and new ones could be instigated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of the Republic of Serbia, I ask you, the member-states of the OAS, to maintain your reservation on the Kosovo issue while the International Court of Justice deliberates on this crucial question.

This is the only way to avoid doing any further damage to the legitimacy of the international system and the universality of the values we hold in common.

And it is the only way to re-open the window of opportunity behind which stands the prospect of a negotiated, compromise solution to the future status of Kosovo acceptable to all the stakeholders.

It is the key to securing the full integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union—a goal shared by all in the region.

In the name of consolidating a more hopeful, democratic future for all who live in our province of Kosovo as well as in the rest of Serbia, and throughout the region, **I ask for your support for the resolution we will submit to the United Nations General Assembly in September**

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This is a moment for strategic thinking, bold ideas and legitimate solutions. Let us together make that moment come true.

I thank you for your attention.