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Excellencies,

Respected Faculty,

Dear Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Director Dehousse, thank you for that kind introduction, and for speaking so highly of the significance of our bilateral ties.

There's a distinguished list of Frenchmen—such as Victor Hugo, Andre Malraux, Charles de Gaulle and François Mitterand—who have seen something special in Serbia—a proud European nation that has historically looked to this country for support and friendship.

I was born in our capital Belgrade, one of only five cities to have received the French Republic's Legion of Honor, in recognition of the unique sacrifice Belgraders made during the First World War.

My great grandfather and his brother—both reserve officers in the Serbian Army—were called to duty at the beginning of the conflict.

Their families were made homeless by enemy bombardments, while they made the long journey of retreat across the mountains to the sea in the winter of 1915, where French ships awaited to take them—together with close to 100,000 other Serbian soldiers—to Corfu to recuperate.

Shortly afterwards, they received an order of transfer to the Salonika Front, where they spent three difficult years fighting alongside their French brothers-in-arms, before participating in the historic offensive led by Marshal Franchet d'Esperet to liberate the Balkans from the occupiers.

Having survived the Great War for the soul of Europe, they were present on the day that d'Esperet conferred France's greatest honor to their capital. In his journal, my great grandfather wrote, "Were it not for France, I would not live to see this day."

So having the privilege to speak here, in Paris, is a very personal moment for me—especially given the theme: how to consolidate the Balkans through membership in the European Union, and how restoring our bilateral ties to their deserved place of honor can contribute to the rapid attainment of that strategic goal.

One day, I hope very soon, Serbs and Frenchmen will be together again, this time as representatives in various EU institutions, completing the valiant work begun by our predecessors.

“Волимо Француску као што је она нас волела”—let us love France as she had loved us. This is the inscription that one can read on our monument of gratitude to the French Republic, located in the heart of Belgrade’s central park, Kalemegdan, and consecrated in 1930. It celebrates the great friendship forged between our two countries, when we stood shoulder-to-shoulder to secure peace for the Old Continent.

This grand endeavor, which means so much to me for the personal reasons I just touched upon, was not the first time our two nations came together. The Franco-Serbian relationship goes back centuries. In a sense, it traces its roots to the mid 13th century, to the reign of one of Serbia’s longest-ruling kings, Stefan Uroš Nemanjić.

Seeking alliance with Western realms, around the year 1250 King Uroš took as his wife Helène of Anjou—by tradition a cousin of Charles I of Sicily and Naples, and his brother King Louis IX, better known as Saint Louis.

Queen Jelena, as we call her, was a remarkable woman. Her charity work was unsurpassed at the time, especially her devotion to orphans and the poor. She established the first school for underprivileged girls, while founding a number of monasteries—both Catholic, in tribute to her

homeland, and Orthodox, in tribute to her new country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following the restoration of Serbian statehood in 1804, my country quickly came to embrace the principles of the French Revolution. Like this nation, we began afresh.

I do not mean to equate France with Serbia. Obviously, our historical circumstances were vastly different. My point is that our successful efforts at modernization were largely modeled on those of France. To give but one example: the Napoleonic Code was translated into Serbian, and in 1834 served as the basis of our first Civil Code.

Four years later, our two countries formally established diplomatic relations. Thus began the modern history of Franco-Serbian friendship, rooted in a common adherence to the values of the Enlightenment. Following the 1852 visit by our Foreign Minister to Napoleon III, France and Serbia began to work together on establishing our respective places in the mainstream of 19th-century European politics.

One could say this was embodied in the person of a future king of Serbia—Peter the First, after whom a street is named in the 16th arrondissement not too far from here. Educated at Saint Cyr, he fought valiantly on the side of France in 1871, and witnessed the birth of the Third Republic. Upon coming to the throne in 1903, King Peter received the French ambassador, and said: “We meet on behalf of two young countries peopled by two ancient nations. We are very much alike: in temperament, surely, and in ambition; but also in belief that to endure, aspire and succeed constitutes the essence of our identities.”

His example was far from unique. Serbia sent a large number of her best and brightest to France, so as to learn from the wisdom of our friends on how to endure prudently in misfortune, and proceed magnanimously in triumph.

Your country actively encouraged this effort. In 1915, for example, your National Assembly voted to allocate funds to educate a great number of Serbian students. As a result, between the two World Wars, around 30,000 young Serbs received a French university diploma. One of these was Koča Popović, after whom our Diplomatic Academy is named.

A 1932 graduate of the Sorbonne, Koča wrote surrealist poetry in the cafés of Paris before going on to fight on the side of the Second Republic of Spain against fascism. Upon his return to Belgrade, he became a founding member of the Partisan movement during the Second World War.

, and later Foreign Minister

of Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1965. Together with his friend and successor as minister, Marko Nikezić

—born of a French mother—they helped the country carve a singular position for itself during the Cold War, and personify the golden age of our diplomacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, we must not forget that the strategic objective of bringing together under one roof all the nations of our continent has not yet been achieved. There is still much work to be done before the dream of a whole and united Europe can be fulfilled. Today, despite its incredible accomplishments, the European Union remains incomplete.

Standing here before you, in the capital of the French Republic—a country that has served as the engine of the new European construction—I want to state clearly that Serbia is fundamentally committed to fulfilling its European destiny.

Let there be no doubt about that. We are a proud European nation whose central strategic priority is the achievement of full and rapid EU membership.

The citizens of Serbia seek a better, more prosperous life for their families and their country, and look forward to making a contribution to the common European interest. We are staunchly devoted to completing the task of reconciliation, and to maximizing the advantages—the moral, political, economic and social advantages—of a joint undertaking endowed with a noble purpose.

This purpose, the purpose of Europe, was first articulated by a Frenchman, Jean Monet, when the Coal and Steel Community was established.

Its grandeur is matched only by its profundity: to keep strengthening the trust necessary to sustain engagement in a long-term enterprise; to aim higher and to be better than previous generations of statesmen; to end the feuds of a thousand years; and to eliminate from the shores of Europe a zero-sum approach to the conduct of politics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the indispensable anchor of stability in the Western Balkans, Serbia is proud of what this region has achieved in the first decade of the 21st-century—following an ignoble period of conflict-induced setbacks—and energized by what it can accomplish in the time to come.

We understand, in a way some of our predecessors did not, that national success cannot come about in isolation. As contemporary European democrats, we celebrate interdependence. And we understand that the success of all is in the *common* advantage. And that it helps entrench our *common* European values—like the ones that promote soft power abroad, the rule of law at home, and consensus-making as the norm for decision-making in the various institutions of the Union.

Starting on January 1st, 2010, we expect the citizens of Serbia to be able to see for themselves, as never before, the tangible benefits that EU membership will bring, when our country is finally placed on the White Schengen List—enabling anyone with a Serbian passport to enjoy freedom of movement throughout Europe.

We are grateful for France's clear support on this issue. It will be of immense importance to ordinary citizens. But we mustn't stop there.

More is required to sustain the momentum for Western Balkans' EU membership perspective.

In the very near future, we have to start taking concrete steps towards European accession. That's what we hope to begin achieving once our two countries sign a historic Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation later this year. The spirit of this text emphasizes the leading role of France in bringing Serbia into the European Union.

The French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner co-wrote an article with Sweden's Carl Bildt in *Le Figaro* last year, in which we read: "it is certain that Serbia will soon be a member of the EU, because there is no alternative. This is in tune with the march of history."

A vast majority of Serbian citizens have embraced this point of view. Our domestic debate about where we belong is over. Two national elections were held in Serbia last year—one presidential, the other parliamentary. For our country, these were referenda about how to interact with the

world of today: our citizens were given a clear choice between two opposite ways forward. And they decided to cast their vote for a European future. Twice.

The on-going debate in some parts of the EU about the imminence of Serbia's European future should also come to an end. This is not just about making sure diplomatic promises are kept. It is about something much more important: consolidating peace and stability in the Western Balkans—once and for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some have said that after Croatia, a pause should ensue before the process of extending the boundaries of Europe can be resumed.

In my opinion, they could not be more wrong.

Taking a break—confirming the notion of enlargement fatigue—would produce devastating political effects in Serbia and throughout the Western Balkans. The cost to Europe's credibility in the region would be immeasurable.

It would re-open old wounds, and revive old suspicions. A collective malaise would set in, resulting in accession fatigue. Populists throughout our region could even start saying that Europe is pushing us into the same enlargement boat as Turkey.

This is not the occasion to discuss the pros and cons of Turkish EU membership, but allow me remind you that the Western Balkans were a part of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years. It is part of our collective memory. So I hope you understand that, given the circumstances, our fears about taking a step back into something akin to an *ancien régime* are not entirely inexplicable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have spoken frankly about the great many issues that bind our two countries to one

another, so I will mention one where we regretfully disagree. It concerns UDI—the unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic-Albanian authorities of Serbia's southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Let me make it clear that Serbia will not recognize Kosovo's UDI. We will continue to defend our integrity in a non-confrontational manner.

That is why, from the very onset of this grave crisis, Serbia ruled out the use of force. We chose to respond to this attempt at secession with utmost responsibility and restraint.

This strategic decision constitutes a paradigm shift in favor of peace in the Balkans. 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—was steered clear of resorting to the force of arms.

A part of our strategy was to find ways to compartmentalize the issue. On the one hand, to work closely with the UN and the EU on resolving practical matters on the ground in Kosovo—for the benefit of all residents of the province.

On the other hand, to turn to the instruments of peaceful adjudication, by asking the International Court of Justice to rule on whether Kosovo's UDI is in accordance with international law.

By transferring the UDI issue to the judicial arena, we have demonstrated how we want to manage political differences. In our view, this represents a role model for contemporary conflict resolution—one that could be applied anywhere in the world where the divides are deep, the historical burdens heavy, and the issues involved go to the very heart of defining one's national identity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to conclude with a few simple remarks.

I believe we are all entering a period where only results matter—a period of consequence and significant choice, of increasing global interdependence and rising European solidarity.

Moments such as this come along rarely in history. They are either seized or lost, and the effects can reach across decades. The opportunity is here. We must grasp them and nurture them, so that they may grow strong and good.

Come what may, Serbia will remain on track. We will continue to be dedicated to fulfilling the goals we have set for ourselves. And we will work hard on achieving membership in the European Union as soon as possible.

With strategic partners such as France by our side, I am confident that we will succeed.

Two days from now will mark the 75th anniversary of the assassination of our King Alexander and your Foreign Minister Louis Barthou by ultranationalists and fascists.

We are duty-bound to commemorate this act of terror by adherents of an ideology that would soon set out to aggressively envelop the world in barbaric darkness—for it helped set in motion events that cost so many millions of lives throughout Europe and across the world.

I will travel to Marseille—the scene of this tragedy—to lay a wreath in a ceremony that itself recalls the sublime profundity of our relations, even in times of grief.

We will have occasion to reflect on the words of Queen Marija, who, upon being informed of her husband's murder, broke into tears, and said, "My only consolation is to know that he has died in the land of France, the country he loved the most after his own."

Well, in part due to the great efforts of that generation, the scourge of fascism has been wiped off the face of the earth, the European construction is on the way to completion, and our two nations are about to enter into a new era of strategic partnership and cooperation.

I would like to believe that in a very short time, on many happy occasions to come, my fellow countrymen will be in a position to express the same sentiment as that of our former Queen, in a context that celebrates a common future in Europe, equal opportunity and solidarity for all its inhabitants, and the pursuit of something no generation in living memory has enjoyed without interruption: a calm, dignified life devoted to building a just and prosperous society for all the citizens of Serbia.

Thank you very much for your attention.