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Mr. President, thank you for convening this session of the Security Council.

Since our last meeting devoted to Serbia's southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, a new Government in Belgrade was confirmed by our National Assembly.

It represents a more hopeful Serbia, confident in its engagement with the world; ready to

accelerate our progress toward full European Union membership; willing to actively contribute to building up regional peace; and firmly committed to safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country.

In short, it represents a Serbia that is a proud, European democracy whose well-known position on the UDI of our southern province remains unchanged. We continue to hold that its attempt at secession contravenes the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and other cornerstone treaties of the contemporary international and European order.

We maintain that UDI has also brought the explicit *meaning* of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) into serious question, for 1244 clearly places a *binding*, Chapter VII obligation on all member-states to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country.

A great majority of the world organization's 192 member-States have continued to abide by these principles. On behalf of the Republic of Serbia, I want to express my profound appreciation to them for their strict commitment to the rule of international law, and state clearly my country's unbroken dedication to those same precepts.

Questioning the principle of sovereignty anywhere in the world is a dangerous game fraught with precedent and political consequence. As a result, international law and the region's

strategic priorities are in danger of being sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. As a result, we find ourselves facing a perilous impasse today.

Mr. President,

Serbia cannot accept—and will continue to oppose—its own forcible partition.

I strongly believe that no country represented in this room would do otherwise.

I don't think there can be any serious doubt about that.

And I want to emphasize something else about which there should be no doubt: the Republic of

Serbia believes that coming together in compromise is the *sine qua non* of a more profoundly integrated Europe and a more prosperous, interdependent world.

We believe in peaceful and consensual resolution of disputes, including the one we are here today to discuss. Such an approach is the only one that stands a chance to achieve a sustainable solution to Kosovo acceptable to all stakeholders.

With this in mind, I now turn to a consideration of the Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in our province of Kosovo, dated 15 July 2008.

I do notice that its overall tone has improved over previous ones, and the criticism of the Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade has subsided—a welcome development.

And yet, I must express regret at the Report's tendency to downplay the fundamental distinction between positions that aim to uphold the primacy of the rule of international law and those that aim to side-step its basic tenets.

I also regret that the United Nations has still not released the findings reached by Mr. Ssekandi on allegations that senior UNMIK officials ordered the excessive use of force on March 17th against Kosovo Serb demonstrators in the town of Kosovska Mitrovica, as is plain from paragraph 7 of the Report.

In addition, I must highlight the fact that nowhere does the Secretary-General's Report explicitly condemn the illegitimate adoption of a—quote—constitution—end quote—by the Kosovo Albanian authorities that attempts to eliminate any role or function of the United Nations in our southern province. This so-called “constitution” makes reference to implementing the Ahtisaari Proposal, a document that has no legal standing with the Security Council—much less with the Republic of Serbia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A grave violation of resolution 1244 has been committed. It should have been addressed directly. Instead, the Report merely asserts the existence of a “profoundly new reality in which UNMIK can no longer perform [...] its tasks as an interim administration.”

Turning to a more general point, I must also regrettably contrast the passive approach of the United Nations on the question of defending its Security Council-mandated executive authority with its activism on the matter of reconfiguration.

Proceeding without the consent of the Security Council—against the clearly communicated will of the Republic of Serbia, the host-country of the United Nations mission in Kosovo—the Secretary-General had instructed his Special Representative to reconfigure UNMIK.

The argument that was made to justify this encroachment on the statutory prerogatives of the Security Council was one of expediency: the Council could not agree, but it was necessary to move forward anyway.

Imagine, if you will, Excellencies, what could happen when some place other than Kosovo is at issue in this chamber—one in which a different constellation of forces and interests is in play.

Would it again be appropriate to move ahead without the Security Council's approval?

Mr. President,

The way in which reconfiguration started was an inglorious episode indeed.

But what is now of crucial importance is for it to proceed in the right way—with the full engagement of Serbia. It must be completed with our acceptance, and explicitly approved by the Security Council. Such is the only way to deliver legitimacy and ensure the sustainability of our work.

With cautious optimism I can say that my meeting with the Secretary-General last week produced an understanding that could hopefully lead to an eventual agreement—one that would require, in the end, the approval of the Security Council.

The voice of Serbia—on reconfiguration and much else besides—should no longer be avoided or disregarded.

Two days ago SRSG Lamberto Zannier traveled to Belgrade for talks on the six topics of “practical mutual concern”, in the language of the Report—namely police, judiciary, customs, transportation and infrastructure, boundaries, and patrimony.

This first meeting was an important first step toward protecting the well-being of Serbs and other non-Albanians in Kosovo.

As the SRSG remarked to me, “to solve problems together we must reach decisions together.” We agree fully. And so it is in that constructive frame of mind that my colleague, the Minister for Kosovo and Metohija, Mr. Goran Bogdanovic, will meet with Mr. Zannier early next week for talks on judiciary and police in Serb-dominated areas..

The hard work of compromise is about to begin.

Mr. President,

I want to be clear in saying that Serbia will spare no effort to honestly engage with the United Nations in forging an acceptable, forward-looking reconfiguration arrangement—one that upholds the overall authority of the UN, while opening up space for the institutional inclusion of key regional organizations.

I must be equally clear in saying that reconfiguration must not go beyond the red lines marked out by resolution 1244. It must not in any way infringe upon the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia.

Once explicitly confirmed by the Security Council, such a construction could go far in the direction of addressing the very concrete, numerous challenges the Serbian and other non-Albanian communities in Kosovo currently face.

Mr. President,

Today, the situation on the ground is far from normal. I will limit myself to three examples.

First, after UDI, even fewer IDPs have returned to Kosovo—a total of only 49 Kosovo Serbs from March to the end of June, according to the Secretary-General's Report. This clearly demonstrates the undercurrent of exclusion and intolerance that permeates throughout the province.

Second, following UDI, cultural cleansing has returned. Witness the abominable act of paving over the ruins of the recently destroyed Serbian church in the center of Djakovica, thus compounding physical destruction with the attempt to erase every trace of its very existence. Or the defiance of the municipal authorities in Decane to restore the cadastral record of land belonging to the monastery of Viskoi Decani, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has been rightly placed on its List of World Heritage in Danger—notwithstanding two Executive Decisions by the SRSG ordering them to do so.

And third, since UDI the return of illegally-seized private property has come to a stand-still. More than 30,000 such cases are outstanding. Those affected—Kosovo Serbs overwhelmingly—barely manage in make-shift dwellings or IDP camps, while Kosovo Albanians continue to live in their homes and make use of their agricultural fields—without fear of arrest or prosecution.

In short, life for the most troubled community in Europe has become almost unbearable. For many of them in the enclaves, their fate depends on how they feel they can survive despite the hostility of their immediate surroundings. For others, we are talking about a community that is inseparable from the rest of Serbia.

False frontiers can create flashpoints—and so can imposed the so-called reality. We must be very frank about this.

Mr. President,

The only prosperous destiny for the Western Balkans manifestly lies in the European Union.

Serbia is very serious about rapidly securing its membership in the EU. We have unmistakably demonstrated this fundamental commitment in recent days by the decisive steps taken to reaffirm our full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former-Yugoslavia in The Hague.

And Serbia strongly believes in the power of the 21st-century values of Europe and their ability to reconcile former adversaries.

Consistent with these beliefs, I say: It is time to turn the page on the divisions of the recent past.

By pursuing a policy of peace through compromise, the Western Balkans can truly be transformed into a region that submits to the rule of law, while embracing the promise of Europe and the principles that stand at its foundation.

So I see the present as a historic moment—as important for us as it is for the European Union. Together we can create a region that looks to the future with optimism, proud of its many identities, and secure of its prospects.

Mr. President,

Such is the vision of the new Government of Serbia. *This* is the true “new reality” we aim to achieve, together with our partners and friends. And

this

is the strategic framework informing our approach to resolving the problem of Kosovo.

In conclusion, we hope that all in this room agree that a step in the right direction is making reconfiguration acceptable to all the parties represented in this room, starting with the Republic of Serbia.

We intend to play our constructive part—without shying away from the defense of our sovereignty and territorial integrity in line with international law.

By aiming to “unite people and not states”, to use the formulation of one of the founding fathers of the European Union, Jean Monet, we can move this issue forward in concert.

Together we can find a way back to our common home, and ahead to our common future.

Thank you, Mr. President, for having given me the opportunity to address the Security Council.