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Mr. President,

Distinguished Guests,

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address this distinguished audience as part of my visit to your extraordinary country—one that has paid such a high price in securing its rightful place in the global community.

Since Viet Nam re-established its independence and began its colossal struggle for re-unification, you have offered an outstretched hand to all the nations of the world, on the basis of mutual respect, equality, and friendship.

Serbia too is such a country.

This morning, I will try to lay out for you the way we view the international system and our place in it, as well as discuss our relations with the friendly Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. I will touch upon our goal of attaining membership in the European Union, and spend time discussing Serbia’s approach to our region, Southeast Europe. I will also discuss the challenge to our sovereignty and territorial integrity posed by the unilateral and illegal declaration of independence of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, and the dangers to the

international system that have resulted from this precedent-setting act.

I have just come from laying a wreath at the mausoleum of the founder of modern Viet Nam, Ho Chi Minh, one of the most important figures of the 20th century. Before leaving for Hanoi, I asked to see the commemorative album of his historic visit to Yugoslavia in 1957, the very year our two countries established diplomatic relations.

President Tito was a generous host, paying tribute to the revolutionary struggle of the Vietnamese people. He spoke of Yugoslavia's willingness to provide your country with security assistance, and pledged support for the development of your agricultural and industrial development. When it counted, when the hardship of sacrifice was upon you, my country delivered; it helped contribute to your historic achievement, thus further cementing our ties.

Starting from that auspicious beginning, our two nations have forged a true friendship—despite the thousands of kilometers that separate us. Let me especially recall, by way of illustration, the important role played by my country in securing the admission of Viet Nam to the United Nations. In 1977, our renowned diplomat, Mr. Lazar Mojsov, was President of the UN General Assembly, and had the honor of declaring Viet Nam the 149th member of the world organization—the culmination of a sustained campaign on the part of Yugoslavia and several other leading countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

On that historic day, ambassador Mojsov spoke of the happiness he felt that your country had

assumed its rightful and deserved place in the global community of nations. “The admission of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam marks a further step towards consolidating peace and security in the world,” he said. “Unjustly and for too long a time”, he continued, “this courageous and martyred country was unable to join us. Now all that is past and we must turn to the future”, he concluded.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Decades ago, thanks to the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, Viet Nam chose to fix a strategic gaze toward the future. You suffered greatly under succeeding waves of occupation. And out of the ashes of a thirty-year struggle, you re-emerged onto the world stage as a strong regional factor of stability, a leader in economic dynamism, and a pioneer of contemporary poverty reduction policies.

Your courageous people have met adversity with hard work, indomitable spirit and intellectual innovation.

Your commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement, of which my country was a founding member,

and your devotion in helping solidify an international system that is based on the founding principles of the United Nations Charter, is well-known and greatly valued.

And your significant contribution to the transformation of Southeast Asia from a war-torn and divided region into one characterized by peaceful cooperation through your active membership in ASEAN, as well as your national example of success in reconstruction, is strongly respected.

In this context, I would like to share with you my favorable impressions of the words of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, who spoke recently of the global requirement to increase efforts to maintain peace and stability throughout the world; to promote equal, cooperative relations between states, and to ensure an international environment conducive to the secure development of each and every country. I believe that the construction of a future characterized in this way—a world of continuous reform, enhanced social justice and industrial innovation—provides a firm foundation for the sustainable prosperity of the entire planet.

In the 21st century, the world has become more interdependent, multipolar, and globalized. At the same time, the global community is, worryingly, less coherent, and less predictable. Humankind is therefore presented with a rare opportunity to develop in peace, but at the same time is faced with severe challenges. One such challenge is the evolution of international security issues. As we know well, the dangers posed by conventional military threats have lessened. Yet dangers posed by unconventional ones—such as terrorism, the proliferation of WMD, religious extremism, and ethnic secessionism—have dramatically increased in recent times.

We must work together—developed and developing, North and South, West and East—to ensure a better, cleaner, and more secure world. And we must manage in common the tectonic shifts in the global balance of power that are just around the corner, by rules meant to maintain predictability of action. All other approaches to the future would relegate us to an era of even more unbalanced economic development and dangerous rivalries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia’s destiny lies in the European Union. The president of our Republic, Mr. Boris Tadic, spoke recently of our willingness to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union immediately—an important step in securing official EU candidate status. Were that to happen, Serbia and all of Southeast Europe would be put back on the EU membership fast-track, deservedly gaining entry into one of the world’s greatest political projects.

Serbia has always been a part of Europe: geographically, historically, and culturally. Today’s Europe has developed into a storehouse of values that creates stability and security in our traditionally divided continent. It has become the antidote to isolation, protectionism, and war. It brings people together, expands markets, and inspires attempts at resolving differences in line with the higher aspirations of humankind, instead of giving in to basest instincts.

Our eventual membership in the European Union will only strengthen our capacity to maintain a foreign policy based on the strict adherence to the founding documents of the international system and the European space—documents such as the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. The principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity must continue to form the firm foundation of how we relate to one another in the global arena.

I also want to emphasize that our European accession will give a new meaning to Serbia’s bond of friendship with Viet Nam and other Asian countries. Not only will it deepen your access to the common European market, but I firmly believe that it will increase both understanding and cooperation between the EU and ASEAN.

Another key foreign policy priority is promoting friendly, neighbourly relations among all the countries of Southeast Europe.

That is why Serbia has devoted considerable efforts to ensuring that our regional policies reflect our core belief in the importance of promoting common values, mutual understanding, reconciliation, and the sovereign equality of states.

It also forms part of the constellation of reasons why we have become so concerned with recent developments in our southern province of Kosovo, under United Nations administration since

June 1999.

Wrong moves have been made, calling into question our ability to continue moving rapidly forward. If care is not taken, if strategic thinking is not employed, the region's determined path to prosperity could suffer a fatal, generational blow. And if we falter, if we plunge back into a mindset reminiscent of our recent past, there is a real danger that Southeast Europe could return to division and strife.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I speak of “wrong moves”, I refer primarily to the support by some in the international community for the unilateral and illegal declaration of independence by Serbia's southern province of Kosovo, which took place on February 17th, 2008.

Kosovo for us is not only an integral part of our territory. It is something more: It is a place of tremendous importance for Serbia. Kosovo stands at the crucible of our identity; it is the

essential link between our past and our future; it is what ties the living tradition of Serbia to itself today.

But that is not the reason why the recognition by about thirty countries of the attempt by Kosovo's Albanians to secede from Serbia sets a dangerous precedent for the international system.

If Kosovo does not get resolved on the basis of prudent statecraft and strategic forethought, the world will become much more unstable, and far less predictable.

Let me begin by stating a series of uncontested facts.

In June 1999, the terms of peace *imposed* by NATO on my country in the wake of its 78-day bombing campaign, *explicitly reaffirmed* our sovereignty over Kosovo, while giving the United Nations a mandate to administer the province's internal affairs, as is plain from the text of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. This same resolution placed a *binding* obligation on all member-states to respect the territorial integrity of my country. In this way, Resolution 1244 added force to the general principle stated in the UN Charter that compels all member-states to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Resolution 1244 remains in force today, for the Security Council has not replaced it, thanks in part to the support of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. And yet, tragically, it has been violated in a most direct way.

Through the recognition of Kosovo’s declaration of independence, the forcible partition of a UN member-state, the Republic of Serbia, has been supported. For that is precisely what Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence amounts to.

Through the process of recognition, some countries have chosen to become complicit in the radical transformation of the right to self-determination into an avowed right to independence.

Through the act of recognition, ethnic or religious groups with a grievance against their capitals the world over have been supplied with a play book on how to achieve their ends.

In short, through recognition, acquiescence has been given to the legitimization of a paternalistic doctrine of imposing solutions to ethnic conflicts the world over.

Some would reply that Kosovo is a unique case—that the events that led to the NATO bombing have produced an *inevitable* outcome: the independence of Kosovo.

Let us be very clear on what this proposition actually means. We have been told that Serbia committed uniquely atrocious acts against the Kosovo Albanians. That reconciliation is impossible. That the only way the Kosovo Albanians can be satisfied by granting their maximalist demands. That the time for negotiations has passed. That we have no choice but to accept the imposition of this outcome. That it's for our own good. That to object means we have not discarded the legacy of Slobodan Milosevic's atrocities. And that to engage in a diplomatic and political campaign to impede and reverse this direct and unprovoked attack on our sovereignty and the international system could result in the isolation of Serbia.

In effect, we are being told that our right to define what constitutes our national interest—which at the very least includes the preservation of our sovereignty over our entire territory—is of no relevance.

I have had many conversations in which I have asked for an explanation as to what is so unique about the Kosovo case. I confronted my interlocutors with the atrocities that took place in

Rwanda, or those taking place in Sudan, and asked why they have not advocated the partition of those countries. What was the line that Milosevic stepped over that the leaders of these countries did not?

I have asked that we examine the case of the Kurds in Iraq, who were even gassed by Saddam Hussein in the early 1980s, and who have enjoyed what amounts to *de facto* independence since the early 1990s. I have asked, ‘why has the partition of Iraq not been imposed?’

Usually I receive no answer. Sometimes I am told that forcibly partitioning Iraq does not advance the stability of the region, and that it is therefore not in the interest of any responsible stakeholder to support it. And so no one has.

Now of course, the Middle East is not Southeast Europe, and Iraq is not Serbia. But the parallels are striking and they deserve our consideration. One cannot simply dismiss out of hand the universal view that it would not be prudent to impose a solution to Iraq or, say, to the Arab-Israeli conflict that has lasted for decades, while saying that it’s perfectly alright to do so in the case of Kosovo’s future status. And to say this after only two brief rounds of negotiations—in which powerful countries had stated at the onset that independence would be imposed if we failed to come to an agreement by an artificial deadline.

Ask yourselves: with a pre-set time limit coupled with a pre-announced outcome that corresponded to their opening, maximalist negotiating position, what incentive did the Kosovo

Albanians have to engage in talks that would have required them to compromise from that very position? Why would they not just wait out the clock?

This is exactly what they did.

The Kosovo secessionists were rewarded for their refusal to play by the rules of good-faith negotiations. And this was done absent a serious account by anyone of how imposing a radical solution to an ethnic conflict would advance the consolidation of the European values the entire region has been working hard to embrace. And it was done without any coherent attempt to elucidate how exactly the international system would not be shaken to its very foundation, if Kosovo's independence were to be confirmed.

For let's face it: the gross violation of international law that is being attempted has revived the global debate about the legitimacy of internationally recognized borders. This needs to be addressed, not wished away. For there are clearly dozens of Kosovo-s throughout the world, happy that an attempt has been made to legitimize unilateral secession in the international system.

The dangers for the peaceful development of many parts of the world—Southeast Asia included—could not be more apparent. Think of the use that separatists in Aceh and Papua could make of the Kosovo precedent—as well as those in the Philippines, Thailand or Sri Lanka.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This danger of which I have spoken is very real, and very worrisome.

The only way to circumvent the disaster is to re-start negotiations on a compromise, mutually-acceptable solution to our province's future status.

There is no other option than to return to the negotiating table. This will not be easy. But the alternative is for Kosovo to remain an entity-in-limbo unattractive to foreign investment, unresponsive to the rule of law, and unable to control its freefall to failure.

We are ready, at any time, and in any place, to engage in talks with the authorities in Pristina

under the auspices of the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We cannot acquiesce to a unilateral declaration of independence. Were we to give our consent—were we even to imply the acceptance of an imposed outcome by a constellation of powers stronger than we—we would become complicit in posing a fundamental threat to our own democratic development, and the European future of Southeast Europe.

This we cannot do. Such a concession we can never make. That responsibility to our country, and to the global order, we will on no account renounce.

Kosovo shall remain a part of Serbia forever.

Let me conclude on a personal note. When I was in school, I learned about the struggle of the Vietnamese people, about Ho Chi Minh, and about the millions who performed the ultimate sacrifice so that future generations could live in peace and prosperity. And I learned about Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, about her almost legendary exploits in the south, and about her efforts to reunify your homeland. And then one day she came to Belgrade. The year was 1989.

I vividly recall watching the television coverage of her visit. I recollect her graceful demeanor, and her message of peaceful development and self-reliance. I remember feeling honored that she had come to my country.

My memories of that visit have reached back across almost twenty years of time to set the tone of this, long in coming, visit by a foreign minister of Serbia to Viet Nam.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Viet Nam’s track record in overcoming tremendous challenges assures that you will continue succeeding—with quiet pride and strength of purpose so characteristic of the great peoples of this region.

Viet Nam’s struggle for basic dignity and justice, for the right to determine one’s own destiny, and for the benefits of peace to extend to your shores, *requires* universal respect.

Serbia on this day reaffirms it. We reiterate our friendship with you. And we reconfirm our dedication to strengthen the international system on the basis of the principles contained in the United Nations Charter, joining with your country and all others that share our vision of a world in which equality and justice, peaceful cooperation, and sustained development, reigns supreme. This is a great task, and it will require much effort. But it is by all means possible, as we recall the wisdom of the traditional Vietnamese proverb: “many hands make light work.”

Thank you for your attention. I stand ready to take your questions.