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Distinguished Guests,

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be the first ever Foreign Minister of the Republic of Serbia to visit this extraordinary country—a country that has traditionally offered an outstretched hand to all who seek the encouragement of the American example, the assistance of the American experience, and the friendship of the American people.

America has always looked to the future. From Winthrop’s vision of America as a shining city on a hill, Publius’s writings about the value and blessings of a union, and Lincoln’s legendary defense of its rebirth, to FDR’s persuasive case for a New Deal and JFK’s commitment to the New Frontier; from *détente* and the end of the Cold War to the New World Order and the balance of power that favors freedom—the United States has stood as the symbol of “a world quite new”, as Tocqueville put it, a world in which the democratic “habits of restraint” commingle with the prudence of those who exercise the craft of state.

That is why I want to frame my remarks to you this afternoon within a vision for the future. But I will also speak of the challenges we face in consolidating our democracy and the values that are at its foundation.

We believe the values of democracy to be inherent in human identity. They frame our behavior and our way of thinking; they bring out our humanity—they allow what binds us together to come to the surface of our nature. They allow history to progress, and they allow the ennoblement of humankind to take shape.

And we believe that these values we share in common are self-evident truths.

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Our common values helped forge a relationship between Serbia and the United States that began more than 125 years ago. And our common values made sure we were strong allies in two World Wars. And then, in the first, hardest years of recovery from Hitler’s brutal occupation of our country, as Stalin sought to consolidate his grip in Eastern Europe, my country had the courage to stand up and say no to Stalin. And America supported us. And he blinked. And we preserved our freedom.

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Today, my country is doing everything in its power to pursue policies that will never again lead to war and misery for our people, for *all* our citizens, and for our whole region. That is why we are working so hard to reconcile with our neighbors, and fully cooperate with the Hague Tribunal—and why we are so dedicated to full European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

It’s because *we know* how terrible the price has been paid. We know what it means to have history wrap itself around your neck—and take a bite at your head—before you knew it had returned, before you even knew that some had said that history had come to an end.

So when we tell you—those of us who formed our central political experiences during the Balkan nightmare of the 1990s—when *we* tell you that there is a clear and present danger to the values we have fought so hard to reintroduce into the hearts and minds of our citizens—*we expect you to hear us, and we expect you to trust us.*

So hear me when I say that this may well be the last opportunity for the current generation to anchor the Western Balkans into the contemporary mainstream. We—the democratic leaders of Serbia—are the ones left holding the line. We are the torch bearers of the values that bind us to one another *as rarely before in our history.*

It is up to us, therefore—the new generation of leaders, to which I aspire to belong—to complete the final stage in the construction of a Europe that is truly whole, permanently free, and forever at peace.

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I believe that without the full consolidation of these values throughout the Balkans—values that men first put into practice on *these* shores—the international system would no longer stand on quite so solid a foundation—at least in our part of the world. The protective cloak of freedom would again give way to the divisive wall of nationalism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Most of you are here because in one way or another you have a stake in our success.

I tried to sketch for you the broad outlines of what success in the Western Balkans means to us: the final triumph of the values we hold in common.

So much has already been achieved since the democratic overthrow of the tyranny of Milosevic in October 2000. We dug ourselves out of more than a decade of gross misrule, burdened by the legacy of being both a post-communist and a post-conflict society. Even the tragic assassination of the engine of our democratic success, the late Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, did not destroy our determination.

Consider that in all the elections held since October 2000—be they local, provincial, parliamentary or presidential—the democratic forces of Serbia have triumphed overwhelmingly. In less than seven short years, look at what we have accomplished:

- the reintroduction of democratic institutions;
- the restoration of the rule of law;
- the establishment of a market economy;
- the strengthening of human and minority rights;
- the dedication to locate, arrest, and hand-over all Hague indictees who are still at large;
  
- the unambiguous determination to move rapidly toward full European accession;
- and the drive toward active participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program and eventual NATO membership.

Yet there is one thing that can make it all go away—one thing that can reverse the tremendous progress that has been made.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The gains we as a country have made will likely be reversed if the imposition of the independence of Kosovo takes place. And if we falter, so will the rest of the region. For just as our success is virtually guaranteed to propel the Western Balkans forward, so a real danger exists that Serbia’s plunge back into her recent past could hurl the region back to the 1990s.

Should independence be imposed against the will of the democratic leadership of Serbia—and without the sanction of the UN Security Council—a whole host of ethnic and sectarian problems could again rise to the surface.

The Kosovo precedent would not just affect the Western Balkans. Throughout the world, existing conflicts could escalate, frozen conflicts could reignite, and new ones could be instigated.

And the doctrine of the forced partition of internationally recognized states—which is what

imposing Kosovo’s independence on Serbia constitutes—would become an acceptable norm in the international system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some say that Kosovo is a unique case, but I simply don’t believe that’s true. An anchor of the international system would be cut away—despite all attempts to claim otherwise. For precedents cannot be announced or denied, they just happen.

The claim that Kosovo is a unique case rests on the assertion that a *uniquely* tyrannical regime ruthlessly oppressed a minority and denied them human rights. But there is nothing unique about Milosevic’s crimes in the recent annals of human history. Think only of Darfur, or Rwanda, or the case of the Kurds in Iraq.

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There is no doubt that Saddam’s crimes against the Kurdish minority, for example, were truly atrocious. But encouraging the forcible partition of Iraq does not advance the stability of the region, and therefore is not in the interest of any responsible stakeholder to support it. And that’s why no one has.

Now of course, one could say that the Middle East is not the Western Balkans, and that Iraq is not Serbia. But the parallels are striking and I think they deserve our consideration.

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On the question of Kosovo, the only *responsible* way forward is for the two sides to work patiently with the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation—together with other stakeholders in the international system—and find a solution to Kosovo’s future status that is acceptable to us all.

We need to combine our resources and experiences to achieve a creative, compromise solution to the future status of Kosovo.

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Such a solution ought to be based on a number of mutually-reinforcing precepts, fundamentally rooted in the values we hold in common.

I will mention a few of the precepts that, taken together, would secure regional stability and make real the potential for prosperity to take hold in the Western Balkans—once and for all time. The solution to Kosovo’s future status must be sought within the framework of these precepts.

One, the consolidation of democracy in Serbia. As the pivot country in the region, we can assume the role of regional EU accession accelerator, but only if our democratic transition does not suffer a potentially fatal setback accrued through the imposition of Kosovo’s independence.

Two, the acceleration of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans.

Three, maintaining the inviolability of internationally-recognized borders and the respect of the sovereign equality of states, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, among other documents.

Four, the right to the broadest possible self-governance for the province’s Albanians. Internationally-guaranteed institutions ought to be established—institutions that provide for the administration of Pristina’s domestic affairs totally unimpeded by Belgrade.

Five, the international guarantee of human and minority rights for all residents of Kosovo. Conditions must be created for the sustainable return of the more than 200,000 mainly Kosovo Serb IDPs to the province.

Six, comprehensive efforts at reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians. The way forward lies in helping us confront the legacy of the 1990s, for the demonization and caricature of the other side is no way forward.

Seven, the international guarantee to safeguard the priceless cultural and religious heritage of the province, some of which has been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

And eight—although in truth it underpins the previous seven—the unconditional commitment to

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I don’t think we can.

I don’t think it’s too late to find a creative, balanced solution—a solution that advances the regional accession prospects of the *entire region*. A solution that promotes the consolidation of democratic values and institutions. A solution that advances the economic transformation of the Western Balkans, and the security architecture of all of Europe.

It’s *not* too late, for we all *must* be a part of a *Trans-Atlantic solution*, not a part of a *Balkan problem* .

Serbia is ready, ready and capable  
to reach

a  
*historic*  
compromise with the Albanians of Kosovo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some have said to Serbia, choose Europe or Kosovo. And if you choose Kosovo, you loose

both. That’s an impossible choice, an indecent proposal to say the least, in the Europe of the twenty-first century.

I wonder what it would be like—what answer we would get—if the Kosovo Albanians were asked to choose between Europe and independence.

But I cannot subscribe to such black and white thinking, for our way is different. A post-Milosevic, pro-Western, genuinely democratic generation has been entrusted with the reigns of power in Belgrade, a generation that yearns for dialogue, concession, reconciliation and negotiations with Pristina. We don’t ignore the past, because a country with no past has no identity, and a country with no identity has no future—unless we define citizenship as just a group of people sharing a passport and postage stamps.

Our way of thinking embraces the hope of democracy, and our way of thinking looks forward to the future. And the way forward is to realize that our common denominator is Brussels. The future of all the citizens of Serbia—Serb or Albanian, Romanian or Hungarian, Roma or Bosniak—is in Europe and in NATO. That’s where our *common* destiny lies. That’s the ultimate logic of the common values we have embraced.

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“The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion.” Those are the words of President Lincoln, and we should make them our own—as we work to restore our belief in ourselves, as we get to work to negotiate, and build, and renew. But an imposed solution is no answer, for it appeals to our worst fears, not our best hopes; to our warlike past, not our peaceful future.

Serbs and Albanians must find the courage to act in wisdom and in conscience, propelled by a hope that beckons us on in this time of trial. It is the path our ancestors were simply not ready to follow.

To build on this hope is a bold and solemn purpose. It requires men and women confident in their strength, compassionate in their hearts, clear in their minds, and steady in their vision.

President Eisenhower said that “to proclaim is easy. To serve will be hard.”

But I think we are ready.

*The time is ripe for daring.*