



Address to
the Permanent Council of
the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić
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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Permanent Council this afternoon, and congratulate the Republic of Kazakhstan for their extraordinarily active and dynamic chairmanship. We are confident that the second half of their mandate will produce continued success.

I look forward to attending the July informal ministerial in Almaty. It will be the first such gathering under this Organization's auspices in Central Asia. This will serve as a great reminder of the truly indivisible nature of security from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

At the onset, I would like to emphasize Serbia's commitment to consensus-based dialogue within the Corfu Process, and to underline our support for the careful examination of all legitimate initiatives that have been proposed as of lately—including the one made by the President of the Russian Federation.

My country will closely examine the Interim Report on the results achieved thus far. We hope it will pave the way for a Heads of State Summit to take place later this year.

Mr. Chairman,

On the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, I reaffirm the Government of Serbia's fundamental commitment to the core principles of the Organization, including the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic and environmental co-operation, the inviolability of internationally-recognized borders, and the maintenance of peace and stability in Europe.

We highly appreciate the OSCE's contribution to Serbia's comprehensive reforms in areas such as the rule of law, media, and minority rights—all of which a number of Permanent Representatives have had the opportunity to ascertain first hand, during their recent visit to Belgrade.

With this Organization's support, I recently hosted foreign ministers from the former-Yugoslavia to discuss a number of OSCE priority issues, including refugees' rights and property restitution. In addition, I informed my colleagues about our zero-tolerance policy on organized crime. My Government will spare no resources in the quest to eradicate this scourge. It is a key part of our efforts to entrench stability throughout the region, leading to the more rapid European integration of the Western Balkans.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me be absolutely clear: EU membership is the central strategic priority of the Republic of Serbia. We took office in 2008, a few months after Boris Tadic was re-elected president in uniquely trying times for our democracy.

The most pro-European administration in the history of our nation has managed to produce significant results under very difficult circumstances. Our track record speaks for itself: 2009 was Serbia's best EU accession year ever, as visa liberalization became a reality and the Interim Agreement was unfrozen.

Despite obvious signs of the so-called 'enlargement fatigue,' we remain deeply committed to the EU accession process. We have been encouraged by the EU Council's decision to enable the beginning of the ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. But let me be very clear: what is absolutely vital to sustain the positive momentum, is for Serbia's EU membership application to be sent to the Commission for consideration in the very near future.

Mr. Chairman,

Crucial to securing the European future of the Western Balkans is the enhancement of good neighborly relations. The commitment by all national capitals to engage on all outstanding issues has greatly contributed to building up the regional level of trust to an all-time high. Key bilateral relationships in our part of the world have begun to visibly improve.

The presidents of Serbia and Croatia have met on numerous occasions since the latter's inauguration earlier this year. Both are firmly committed to working together to bridge the existing divides. Many issues remain open, but all are being discussed in a truly forward-looking manner.

Belgrade and Tirana have taken important steps towards a comprehensive rapprochement. Ilir Meta came to Serbia for an official visit just a few months ago—the first time ever for an Albanian foreign minister. President Tadic will soon travel to Albania, where we expect the launching of a number of concrete initiatives.

During his recent trip to Skoplje, President Tadic reaffirmed the strong relationship we enjoy with our southern neighbor, and offered help in overcoming their longstanding name dispute with the Hellenic Republic.

Mr. Chairman,

Serbia's devotion to Bosnia's prosperous future has been clearly demonstrated time and again. My country's 'One-Bosnia Policy' is complemented by a recent intensification of high-level political dialogue between key Bosnian leaders and Belgrade.

For instance, Presidents Tadic and Silajdzic met twice in the past few months, first in Istanbul and then in Sarajevo—during the latest session of the Igman Initiative. These were followed up in the past few days by visits to our capital from the Speaker of Bosnia's upper house of parliament, Mr. Sulejman Tihic, and the ethnic-Croat president of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity, Ms. Borjana Kristo.

All this has taken place in the midst of a renewed impetus to complete the process of full reconciliation in the Balkans.

President Tadic has taken the lead in working for change. On the tenth anniversary of the massacre, he traveled to Srebrenica to pay respect to the families of the Bosniak victims, and will do so again this July, on its fifteenth.

Serbian society has taken great strides in overcoming the tragic legacy of the 1990s. This paradigm shift prompted the Serbian National Assembly to pass a historic Declaration on Srebrenica. The crime was condemned, apologies were made, and condolences were extended.

This act of parliament was unprecedented—not only for the Western Balkans, but for all of Europe, a continent whose long and bloody history has recorded many events requiring contrition. Yet until now, no legislature has ever done anything comparable. We hope this will prompt others to follow suit in due course.

Mr. Chairman,

The accumulated evidence of progress in the Balkans is conclusive: regional cooperation has never stood on more solid ground than it does today. Even on the most challenging issues, we have found ways to work together.

Heightened flexibility has ensured that the voice of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government is heard in appropriate fora—as long as established criteria, consistent with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), are respected, including the active participation of UNMIK. This worked well during the recently-held High-Level Meeting on the Western Balkans in Sarajevo.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the overall regional environment has become more complicated as a result of UDI—or the unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic-Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Mr. Chairman,

Serbia responded to UDI with maximal restraint, in a way wholly unknown to the Balkan experience. We decided to forgo unilateral counter-measures, such as the use of force or economic sanctions. This was the first time ever that exclusively peaceful means have been mobilized to confront an issue of such magnitude and significance in our part of the world.

From the very onset of this grave crisis, diplomacy stood at the forefront of our efforts to manage political differences. We naturally turned to the United Nations for guidance. We asked, and received, overwhelming support in the General Assembly to refer the UDI issue to the International Court of Justice.

The Court is nearing the end of its deliberations in what has turned out to be a landmark case. It is the first time that the ICJ has been asked to consider the legality of a unilateral attempt to partition a UN member State in peacetime—in defiance of its Constitution and against the will of the Security Council. It is also the first time all five of its Permanent Members participated in a proceeding before the Court. A record number of countries presented their views, making it the largest case in its history.

The ICJ will be reporting back to the UN in the near future.

We do not expect the ensuing debate in the General Assembly to be particularly divisive.

The only logical outcome would be to invite the parties to arrive at consensual solutions to all outstanding issues peacefully, through dialogue instead of unilateralism.

Mr. Chairman,

For more than two years, the OSCE space has been sharply at odds over Kosovo.

We have said time and again that UDI is an outcome that no Serbian democratic leadership will ever be ready to accommodate—implicitly or explicitly. We have not consented to it, and we never will. We shall resist all attempts to force it upon us; peacefully of course, but wholeheartedly, and—if need be—forever.

None of you would act differently, if your country found itself in our situation.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the past months, many have posed the question, ‘what is it that Serbia wants?’ I will answer it simply: we seek a result all parties can embrace. This is the only way to produce a viable, sustainable, and lasting peace—and the only way to help secure regional gains, reinforce shared strategic priorities, and complete the European transformation of the Balkans.

We intend to be constructive and bold in conducting the dialogue that I am persuaded will shortly follow, because our sole aim is to achieve a compromise solution—acceptable to everyone—on all outstanding issues.

These include a number of practical matters, from the rule of law, to guaranteeing lasting international protection for Serbian holy sites. It also comprises topics such as healthcare,

education, telecommunications, and electricity—as well as privatization of socially-owned enterprises, private property restitution, the return of more than 200,000 Kosovo Serb and Roma IDPs, and so on. These are all truly important subjects, and Serbia will re-double its efforts to engage with all responsible stakeholders on finding pragmatic arrangements that would benefit all the residents of the territory.

But let's be honest with one another: at the heart of all these difficulties lies a disagreement on the unilateral attempt at declaring sovereignty.

UDI has acted like salt pored on an open wound. It has manifestly pulled the parties further apart—which is in no one's interest, least of all ours. What we have to do is regain our bearings by equitably addressing the issue of status.

We are fully aware of the fact that some of the most powerful voices in the world have asserted the contrary. With all due respect to their might and influence, Serbia most kindly—yet staunchly—begs to disagree. Nothing of such significance—anywhere in the world—can be proclaimed as settled until the consent of all is secured.

Allow me to appeal to the European consensus principle, which brought to an end centuries-old feuds and divisions on the Old Continent. It is amongst the most fundamental values of the Union that we confidently seek to join.

So as a democratic aspirant country, we pose a very simple question: since this applies to resolving all outstanding challenges in Europe, then why should this one be any different? All we ask is to be treated equally, and that our interests are considered as legitimate as everybody else's.

I honestly don't understand why such an appeal to basic fairness would be seen as a problem by anyone. And I truly hope that rational concerns related to the possibility of importing a complex territorial dispute into the Union will not tragically degenerate into an unprecedented conditionality that no proud nation would ever accept.

Mr. Chairman,

Marcel Proust once wrote that the “real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes able to see what is yet to come.”

The task before us, then, is to find a way to truly see—as if for the first time—the incredible advantages of a compromise solution that would at once strengthen democracy and consolidate stability.

It is what we should try to do, in order to honor the principles that lifted the nations of our continent out from the ashes of whole-scale devastation sixty-five years ago.

Seeing this problem with new eyes, we will be able to achieve what is yet to come for the Balkans: the promise of peace and prosperity that Europe delivers, and this Organization secures.

Thank you very much.