



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

by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić
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[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be present at one of the first sessions of the Permanent Council attended by our new Secretary General, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier. On behalf of the Republic of Serbia, Lamberto, I congratulate you on your election. I would also like to thank you once again for your service as Head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, established under UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). We wish you all success in the discharge of your new responsibilities and duties, and we look forward to working with you.

I want to thank Ambassador Renatas Norkus of Lithuania for inviting me to this Special Meeting in my capacity as concurrent chairman of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the Central European Initiative, and the Southeast European Cooperation Process.

This year, Serbia also presides over the Migration Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative, and in 2012 we will take over responsibilities to lead the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization.

Belgrade, in short, has become the symbolic capital of cooperation in our part of Europe. It will play host to three Heads of State or Government Summits, a historic gathering of speakers of parliaments, and numerous ministerial and expert-level meetings.

In a few days' time, we will also welcome close to 300 MPs to the 20th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. It will take place in the same venue where the First CSCE Follow-up Meeting was held between October 1977 and March 1978.

Whilst in the Chairman's seat, we will aspire to do more than just balance various points of view; in fact, we shall seek to synergize them—as our region undergoes its transformation into a dynamic area of convergence.

As a proud democracy that has weathered enormous challenges against incredible odds, Serbia would embrace the opportunity to draw more extensively on its unique experience in managing differences and overcoming disagreements through regional cooperation.

Excellencies,

Speaking as concurrent chairman of the SEECP, the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, and the Central European Initiative, I want to underline the fact that we consider the OSCE to be a strategic partner in the consolidation of regional peace, democracy and security. We will continue to work towards the full realization of consensus-based, indivisible, cooperative and comprehensive security, framed by the agreed principles, shared commitments, and common goals.

The Astana Commemorative Declaration adopted by our Heads of State and Government last December clearly indicates that one of these is the “achieve[ment] of a greater unity of purpose and action in facing transnational threats” The same document identifies the fight against organized crime as central to this undertaking.

As a matter of fact, this is the common theme driving all our chairmanship activities. Serbia shall spare no effort to eliminate this threat to our security—its root causes, as well as its effects. Our zero-tolerance policy will continue unabated, come what may.

Ultimate success, however, cannot be achieved without a much stronger multilateral commitment, for organized crime is like a virus: it spreads to where it finds least resistance.

Excellencies,

The Republic of Serbia is promoting a number of other chairmanship priorities that are of interest to the OSCE.

For instance, special emphasis is being placed on the complex set of issues related to refugees and IDPs, including all the rights to which they are entitled. We intend to strengthen the working mechanism my colleagues from Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro and I established in Belgrade last spring, with the active participation of this Organization.

Other aspects of human and minority rights are also being highlighted as part of our common chairmanship activities. In some areas, Serbia's protection record even exceeds the European Union's most stringent norms. We are prepared to share our best practices and experience with regional partners.

The example of our 19 National Minority Councils—which were directly elected in 2010—is illustrative. The critical good governance innovation is that these are not merely consultative in nature; when it comes to affairs related to the preservation of identity, the Councils are endowed with executive powers as well.

This is particularly important in the context of Roma, one of the most vulnerable groups in Europe. Serbia has worked very hard to promote their inclusion and empowerment. At the center of our activities is an increased focus on human rights education—targeting classroom students and older generations alike. We believe our initiative can serve as a model to be applied well beyond Southeast Europe.

Excellencies,

The Serbian chairmanships are also prioritizing enhanced coordination and cooperation between the three regional organizations and other multilateral institutions.

One focus is on the OSCE itself—a valued member of the Regional Cooperation Council, which is the implementing arm of the SEECP. We will work to further strengthen the RCC’s successful, project-oriented approach, with a particular emphasis on modernizing infrastructure. Updating the electricity grid is vital, and so is railway network rehabilitation, together with road and fluvial development.

Another focus is on the EU. We will work to deepen the institutional dialogue between Brussels and all the organizations over which we preside in 2011 and 2012. This will apply especially to the SEECP—Southeast Europe’s highest political forum.

We will also keep encouraging the European Commission to take appropriate internal measures to designate the Danube river basin and the Adriatic-Ionian area as official EU macro-regions.

Excellencies,

An additional priority of our concurrent chairmanships is environmental security. Natural disasters and climate change take no account of boundaries. Regions need to work together in developing strong, cohesive adaptation and mitigation strategies.

We have adopted an inclusive approach, co-organizing a number of meetings on this critical public policy issue with various stakeholders, including the OSCE—specifically, the Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Mr. Goran Svilanovic.

Next year, we will promote a concrete initiative that we believe should be an integral part of the solution to the region’s environment security challenges: the Niš-based Regional Humanitarian Emergency Response Center.

This state-of-the-art disaster management facility is designed to optimize civil defense response-time, as well as build capacity for rescuers throughout Southeast Europe. The Center will also serve as a focal point for disaster relief efforts—including rapid

humanitarian assistance, search-and-rescue, population evacuations, and aerial forest firefighting.

We hope that this flagship initiative will be fully supported by member-capitals and regional stakeholders—all of whom are invited to participate in it as full-fledged partners.

Excellencies,

Crucial to building a better future for the region is the enhancement of good neighborly relations. We celebrate the fact that they have rarely been better in our part of the world. A new level of trust and understanding has been established, and key bilateral relationships have visibly improved. This has taken place in the midst of a renewed impetus to complete the process of full reconciliation in the Balkans.

We have taken the lead in working for change. This is the only way to break the vicious circle of hatred, violence, and instability—and to make sure they never again take hold of our political imagination.

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Before concluding, I want to emphasize how critically important it is for regional cooperation not be politicized or linked to diplomatic disagreements over unresolved issues.

On the basis of the ‘all-inclusiveness principle,’ therefore, the Republic of Serbia will continue to encourage the participation of all relevant actors in appropriate regional fora. As we do so, we will remain committed to upholding the strict adherence to binding international legal documents, to the founding acts, statutes and internal regulations of various initiatives, and to the accepted practices of ad hoc regional meetings.

Excellencies,

At the end of my remarks, I would like to turn to a brief remark about the consensus principle that stands at the very foundation of our Organization, and to that of the three regional initiatives over which we are presiding this year.

Its opposite—unilateralism—represents a grave threat to our common space. So does freezing conflicts. Offering piecemeal, stopgap solutions—however appealing they may appear at first blush—will also just give us more of the same: regions with perpetually incomplete agendas.

I truly believe that this cannot be in anyone's interest, and that all of us must demonstrate a strong commitment to solving problems through dialogue that results in consensus.

The way forward will require painstaking work and compromise by all parties. Both traditional misconceptions and legitimate concerns will need to be addressed in fair and inclusive ways.

As in other parts of the OSCE space, this should apply in the present dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. We see the dialogue as a prelude to the achievement of a fair and balanced solution that everyone will be able to endorse. This would bring to an end one of the most noticeable sources of contention between the participating States.

But regardless of whether we're talking about this or any other outstanding issue, we feel that the indivisible approach to security and cooperation remains the guidepost for the achievement of progress. This accords with the founding principles of this Organization which we continue to respect and honor. By working still closer together in the time ahead, we can consolidate an unbreakable peace in our century.

Thank you for your attention.