

President of Montenegro
Milo Đukanović
(Intervention in the General Debate of the 76th Session of the UN General
Assembly
New York, 23 September 2021)

Dear Mr President,
Dear Secretary General,
Your Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address you on behalf of Montenegro and to reconfirm our determined commitment to the principles and tenets of UN Charter and to the mission and goals of the World Organization.

It is also a great pleasure to be here again, in this great hall and with all of you, despite the risks and fears caused by the pandemic. Being here we show strong determination to confirm that multilateralism continues living.

I would like to thank the UN Secretariat and services of the host country for the enormous efforts they have invested to make it possible for the General Debate not only to be a demonstration of hope and belief that the world will deal with the pandemic, but also a secure and safe event for all participants.

Activities of the United Nations in providing the desperately needed medical and humanitarian aid, as well as significant support in treating the serious economic consequences of the pandemic, undoubtedly confirm their important role in the modern world. Today, more than ever, it is clear that we can successfully respond to global challenges only if we act on a global level – by a concerted and coordinated action of all of us. And it is the United Nations that have to stand at the core of that action.

Your Excellences,

Enormous problems and crises that are unfortunately increasingly numerous, require strong leadership. Without leadership the world will not be able to provide what our citizens expect and are entitled to. To our common misfortune, the world has lately been faced with a leadership crisis. The consequences of that crisis can be seen in almost all spheres of global relations. Fragmentation and national approaches still prevail in the behaviour of key international stakeholders. Instead of joint tangible actions, we more often share only our joint concerns.

Clear vision and commitment, quality and continuity, efficiency and effectiveness, cooperation and solidarity, determination and responsibility – make the only path for dealing with the growing global problems – starting with the pandemic and climate change, through famine and migrations, to violation of human rights and humanitarian crises. In that, you will always have an open and reliable partner in Montenegro.

Mr President

The topic of this year's debate refers to the generally accepted opinion that understanding and adequate treatment of multidimensional consequences of the pandemic, aimed at building sustainable future, will largely mark the future actions and behaviours of states and other international factors. It is clear that reinvigorated multilateralism and revitalization of the United Nations are desperately needed. One step towards that goal is the initiative of the Secretary General to respond to emergencies in health, and to social and economic aftermaths of the pandemic by establishing the Covid 19 Response and Recovery Fund and UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan. We warmly welcome the initiative. Our response must be solidary and equally accessible.

Covid 19 pandemic is the most serious crisis since the establishment of the World Organization. However, by mature and more responsible approach, we can learn lessons from every crisis – this time the lesson is a loud warning of how important it is to stand together and to ensure international solidarity in seeking for global solutions. It seems that the world is at a crossroad: We can either choose further isolationism and erosion of trust, tolerating the increase of xenophobia, nationalism and right-wing ideas, ignoring the alarming warnings about the state of the environment, and silently accepting increase of inequality in all fields; or we can make a breakthrough to have a more secure and better future for all and take the path of the “common agenda” – “for people, for the planet, for prosperity and for peace” as the Secretary General Guterres said. It would mean opting for the future that will be based on the highest values of equality and justice, responsibility and solidarity, and not on the retrograde ideologies, selfishness and cheap populism.

I am sure that we mustn't have any dilemma in the process of choosing between these options. We – the leaders and our citizens – have a unique opportunity to use the current crisis as a momentum to build a greener, more just and more sustainable world.

That mission will require efficient and strengthened multilateralism, with the rhetoric that withdraws, giving room to deeds. To overcome the existing geostrategic divisions and dysfunctional international relations we will need a new worldview within our states and a renewed global agreement between the states. Post pandemic recovery and revitalized multilateralism must be based on fair globalization, respect for human rights and dignity of all, environment protection and responsible attitude to nature, and results that will be measured by humane parameters, and not only by economic ones. We should not strive for peace which would be nothing else, but a mere absence of war and we should not strive for development only for the sake of profits. We should strive for peace and progress that will be built on achieving the highest democratic standards and quality of life for all – equally for current and future generations.

The process of strengthening multilateral approach should come together with our work on the strengthening of cooperation in the digital sphere, particularly

now when we are witnessing the influence of technology on the post-crisis recovery and implementation of the sustainable development goals.

Montenegro will continue supporting the efforts invested in the implementation of the reform agenda within the developmental and managerial structures, as well as structures for preserving peace and stability and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We are convinced that functioning of the World Organization can be made more efficient and more flexible only through necessary reorganization.

Mr President,

Supporting the initiative of the Secretary General Guterres “Action for Peacekeeping”, Montenegro again demonstrated political commitment to the mandates of peace operations and their efficient activities, particularly in the field of protection of civilians. We remain determined to contribute, within our capacities, to preservation and enhancement of international peace and security and to extend our participation in UN humanitarian and peacekeeping missions.

Due to the obvious deterioration of the overall international security atmosphere, modernization of armed systems, as well as due to the collapse of some of the most important strategic instruments in this field, international architecture for disarmament, non-proliferation and control of arms are under a significant pressure. That is something that Montenegro, as a responsible UN and NATO member, wants to draw your attention to. Support to implementation and strengthening and to further development of multilateral agreements in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and control of arms must be imperatives for all of us.

Montenegro will also continue working on integration of human rights and gender perspective in all aspects of UN work, defending universality of international human rights law and independence of the human rights system. As a candidate with realistic chances to become a member of the Human Rights Council, we will advocate approximation of the agendas and better synergy between Geneva and New York. Only in that way we will have an opportunity to react timely and prevent mass violations that keep occurring and shocking the world’s public on rather frequent occasions. Until we do that, we will keep reacting *post festum*, almost as a rule, and spending our resources dominantly on de-escalation and dealing with humanitarian crises instead on managing and preventing them.

It is in such a light that we should also observe the obvious deterioration of security and humanitarian situation, while we are preparing for potentially new and stronger wave of migrants that will undoubtedly have regional and global repercussions. We appeal for a global response to the refugee and migrant crisis. We have to share responsibility, as we envisaged in the global agreements for refugees and migrants. We must cooperate in seeking the solutions and help equally to countries of reception and countries of origin. Montenegro is the only of the republics of former Yugoslavia that did not have war in its territory during the conflicts in 1990s. At that time Montenegro accepted more than 100 000 refugees and displaced persons, which was more than 20% of our entire

population. As a UN member, Montenegro finds it very difficult to understand and accept any other approach but solidarity and support for the most vulnerable.

Your Excellences,

We are witnessing the growing climate and environmental crisis. Recently in Geneva, the High Commissioner for Human Rights presented very concerning findings about global human rights situation in the context of the environment. Climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity will constitute by far the most serious challenge for human rights in our era, said the High Commissioner. In that, she clearly recognized human activity as one of the factors and the lack of proper activities as another.

Full implementation of 2030 Agenda and Paris Climate Agreement are crucial for better recovery from the pandemic and preparation of the world for future systemic shocks. That is why it is particularly important that in preparations for the Summit and Conference in Glasgow in November this year, all countries mobilise an additional level of ambition for achieving long-term goals for reducing global warming. Although its share in the global emissions is tiny, in December 2020 Montenegro additionally increased its climate ambition, confirming thus the strong and persistent commitment to adequate treatment of climate challenges. We expect that further activities on the national level will open the space for new and more ambitious breakthroughs. That is why it is exceptionally important to integrate the components of action that will be based on human rights, both when new climate ambitions are set, and when new global biodiversity framework is defined.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year Montenegro celebrated 15 years since restoration of its independence and the time when Montenegrin flag was hoisted for the first time on the East River. Montenegro covered a demanding path from its admission to the UN family, which was the broadest recognition of its restored independence, through its positioning on the main course of UN and our key foreign-policy partners, to the visibility, recognition, and affirmation that we have today and that by far exceed the size of our country.

The path that we have covered was never easy. Particularly not in the Balkans that is burdened by its past and that keeps being the place where conflicting influences clash, and geostrategic interests compete. It keeps being an object of concern of various international actors, but not always an object of the needed attention.

Your Excellences,

Challenges and threats to multi-ethnic democracy in the Balkans have not dwindled. Western Balkans is yet again a battlefield for conflicting geopolitical interest, the consequence of which is slowing down of integration of Western Balkan societies into their natural European setting, which undermines trust and adoption of European values. This confusion does not only lead to a halt and

further lagging behind in the development of this European region, but also opens the space for restoration of destructive theories that claim that, due to the fact that it is lagging behind, this region cannot live as a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional community and that its states cannot be functional. They want to impute this constructed thesis to Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, but also to smaller countries in the region, to make an alibi for restoration of greater-state nationalistic projects that in the 1990s led to the war in Western Balkans with almost 150000 deaths.

Our determination to fight these retrograde and dangerous ideas has not wavered and therefore today, from this place, Montenegro is warning of the renewed danger that Western Balkans will be destabilized, and the horizons of its European prospects reduced.

Montenegro has persisted on building a better future for its citizens on the foundations of equality and without discrimination. It has been building relations of trust and cooperation with all its neighbours. It was, as the highest officials of our hosts used to say, an oasis of peace in the Balkans in the war years of 1990s. As a contributor to regional security, Montenegro became a member of NATO and it is a leader in the process of European integration. In spite of numerous challenges, Montenegro remains determined to defend civic, inclusive, multi-ethnic and European democracy and to be a proof that multi-ethnic democracy is possible in the Balkans and that it is the only guarantee of prosperity.

Montenegro will remain loyal to such an orientation and strongly committed to the values of multilateralism, friendly and open cooperation, further democratic consolidation and strengthening of the rule of law. Among other things, this will lead to the strengthening of our partnership with the World Organization.

Thank you for your attention!