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Address before the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly

by H.E. Mr. Boris Tadić  
President of the Republic of Serbia

New York, 23 September 2011

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The rapid changes in our political and economic environment show, once again, the necessity of this annual gathering of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

We have a difficult task ahead of us.

I wish you, Mr. President, every success and you may rest assured that you have our fullest support.

I also wish to congratulate Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on his re-election. His steady hand has helped to steer the United Nations through challenging times. To him, too, we offer all our support.

This has been a year of momentous change.

An economic crisis pervades most liberal economies. A wave of political change is sweeping through much of the Middle East. Climatic turbulence leaves loss and tragedy in its wake. Famine stalks in the Horn of Africa.

New choices confront political leaders. New priorities are presented to citizens.

The worst that we could do now is to allow fear and indecision to govern us.

These are also times that call for a deep commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism.

Every crisis that we address reaches beyond our national frontiers. There is no way we can resolve these matters without a framework of international laws and rules by which we are all bound.

The financial crisis has had a profound and negative effect on all our aspirations. While each country must adjust its expectations, we cannot allow ourselves to be guided only by our national concerns. In fact, these will be best supported by greater commitment to a deeper solidarity among nations and a far more intense cooperation. The great economic and political unions have achieved success by balancing sacrifice with gain for all. The same challenge now confronts the European Union.

In North Africa and the Middle East, we have seen a wave of protest that has convulsed the region. The Republic of Serbia and the Serbian people have had a long relationship with all the peoples of this region. We stand by them. We know what is involved in such changes.

In a time of such uncertainty, crises call for UN-sanctioned involvement to save lives and to keep the peace. There will be more such missions. I am very pleased that the Republic of Serbia is now actively engaged in several such missions and we will continue our commitment.

The Republic of Serbia is, in this spirit, a signatory of the evolving commitments and conventions of climate change. We also enthusiastically support the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Mr. President,

In times as complex as these, our objective must be to manage real crises well and to avoid creating unnecessary ones.

There are problems which can be resolved through patient discussion and the building of trust. Unilateral action in such circumstances simply creates crisis for no good reason.

This is why, in our regional issues of South Eastern Europe, we always promote the principles and presence of the United Nations. As a founding member of the Non Aligned Movement, we were able to celebrate in Belgrade the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. These are the networks that create layers of communication and trust at a time of globalization

Our bid to join the European Union is the platform on which we intend to build and contribute to our shared objectives.

Regional cooperation is a cornerstone of our diplomacy and we believe that it is only to the benefit of the entire region. This is reflected in our chairmanships of the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. Most importantly, it is also reflected in Serbia's Chairmanship of the South East European Cooperation Process, our region's most important initiative. Next year, my country will follow this up by taking over responsibilities to lead the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization.

Serbia has established an entirely new level of confidence in relations with Croatia. This has been of strategic significance in securing stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome Croatia's imminent accession to the European Union.

All of this has set the stage for Serbia to actively consider seeking the Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for the year 2014—the centenary of the start of the First World War.

The unifying symbolism of 2014 would not only help catalyze efforts to resolve the unfinished business on the Old Continent's shared agenda. It would also help to close the book on an era that did not witness the enduring stability the nations of the OSCE space deserve.

Mr. President,

We have devoted extraordinary levels of resources to capture war criminals. Finally, the Republic of Serbia has completed its obligations to itself and to the international community. We believe that after the tragedies of the 1990s this exercise is a very necessary catharsis for our nation.

This action was also taken to demonstrate that Serbia wishes to move to a climate of total reconciliation throughout the region. We feel we have done our part.

Equally, we insist that everyone else does their part as well. As in all previous instances involving war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Balkans, the Security Council has given a mandate to investigate. This has greatly contributed to the process of regional reconciliation.

This is the standard that must be applied in uncovering the full truth about allegations made in a deeply disturbing report by the Council of Europe entitled "Inhuman Treatment of People and Illicit Trafficking in Human Organs in Kosovo." Only the Security Council can make sure a comprehensive investigation takes place. Only it can give a universal mandate and jurisdiction to ensure that all perpetrators of war crimes in the Balkans are brought to justice, including those responsible for human organs trafficking in Kosovo. I strongly believe that ending the culture of impunity in some parts of the Balkans is a common goal shared by every member of the international community.

Mr. President,

There is a certain irony to our proceedings today.

This year, we have welcomed a new member to the family of the United Nations. This is the Republic of South Sudan. The Republic of Serbia welcomes their membership of the United Nations.

We welcome them because they and the Republic of Sudan, after many years of conflict, arrived at a settlement that was achieved as a result of long and difficult negotiations between the two parties.

The fundamental principle that the best settlements occur when two parties agree – each making compromises – surely is universal.

I subscribe enthusiastically to the comments of the President of the United States, made from this podium, on this very subject of negotiations. I agree that there is no shortcut to the end of a conflict that has endured for a long time, and that peace depends on compromise among people who must live together long after our speeches are over.

However, this rule is not being applied to Serbia on the matter of its province of Kosovo and Metohija.

On February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Kosovo's ethnic-Albanian authorities attempted unilateral secession—a violation of the basic principles of the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

A majority of UN member States have refrained from recognizing Kosovo's UDI. They have continued to abide by their UN Charter obligations to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country.

On behalf of the Republic of Serbia, allow me once again to sincerely thank these countries for their support and solidarity. Earlier this week, we heard from this podium a dangerous appeal for countries to recognize Kosovo. That appeal does not contribute to regional stability. Rather, it lessens our chances to find a solution we can all accept. The appeal we heard is not an appeal for peace, but an appeal to endorse unilateralism, and would create a deeply disturbing precedent—an encouragement for secessionists everywhere.

Mr. President,

In July, talks between Belgrade and Pristina, facilitated by the European Union, were briefly suspended by the facilitator, and just at that time, there was an attempt to impose Kosovo Albanian officials on the Administrative Boundary Line between Serbia proper and North Kosovo. Violence erupted. My Government did all it could to prevent violence from spreading.

But was this necessary? The effect was to remind Serbs that they are negotiating with a gun to their heads and with the constant threat of international isolation. It reminds Serbs that the excuse

of violence by others is a tool used irresponsibly to threaten Serbs. It reminds Serbs of the anti-Serb pogroms in Kosovo in March of 2004. It reminds Serbs of the failed negotiation and imposition of a unilaterally declared independence.

Mr. President,

I want to remind you and all members of the United Nations that on October 5, 2000 the Republic of Serbia voluntarily and peacefully overthrew its past and entered a new phase in its history in which it placed the fate of the Serbian nation under the protection of democracy, civility, peace and dialogue.

For this reason, we take grave offence at this climate of threat emanating from countries which we would otherwise consider our most natural partners.

In the case of Serbia, this dialogue between two parties was initiated in March 2011, following a delay of several months to accommodate the electoral schedule in Pristina.

During these negotiations we have made very significant progress.

The Republic of Serbia, I assure you, will remain a very active party to this dialogue.

There are numerous issues that must be addressed in the months ahead and I appeal to all involved to remain engaged in this process in a spirit of constructiveness.

To that end, we expect KFOR and EULEX to fully observe the UN's doctrine of status-neutrality, in accordance with their mandates under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)—the source of their universal legitimacy, both on the ground and in the international arena.

Mr. President,

Progress needs trust. Negotiations and reconciliation are not achieved through unilateral concessions from one side only. Success does not occur when threats of violence are issued and coercive action takes place in the course of negotiations.

Our response to this is to say that just as we will never accept unilateral action, we will also not abandon the negotiations process.

This is why we have stated that we cannot and will not recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo. It is also why we believe that we must settle all other issues with Pristina because our region needs to have a stable environment.

The Republic of Serbia has always sought tangible assurances, bound by international agreement and guarantees, that Serbian communities inhabiting Kosovo, Serbian interests and Serbia's cultural heritage will be protected and allowed to flourish.

Many of these issues have been discussed over the last few years in different formats. Occasionally there have been agreements reached, but never implemented.

It is time that matters were clarified.

Any form of understanding on the matter of Kosovo has as a *conditio sine qua non* the explicit negotiated and guaranteed agreement on the following matters essential to the protection of Serbs in Kosovo:

The first concerns the status of the Serbian population in North Kosovo. All acknowledge that this is an issue that must be addressed on the basis of the current realities. Attempts to change the current realities would not be conducive to constructive solutions.

The second issue involves the proper implementation of the decentralization in Kosovo. All those enclaves that are isolated from other Serbs must have a political, judicial and economic life providing the standards that allow them to prosper where they are. Serbia remains ready to continue to provide the necessary support to these threatened populations.

The third issue is that of the status the Serbian Orthodox Church and of some of the key holy sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The protection of these sites and the special status that must be given to them to preserve their unique identity and their livelihoods is a matter of fundamental concern. It comes as a matter of surprise to me that an offer that would be acceptable to the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church has not been volunteered by the other side. This issue is one of the most basic ones, and the denial of this should be

considered a total embarrassment to the authorities in Pristina and the supervisory institutions and nations present in Kosovo.

Finally, resolution must be achieved on the question of property. Thousands of outstanding private claims remain pending, making hostages of those internally displaced in 1999. Commercial property claims are unresolved, as well.

The failure to advance with goodwill on the very issue – the rights of the Serbian communities in Kosovo – which is at the core of our concerns is very disturbing.

These four issues are for us the litmus test.

Mr. President,

There is so much that is positive to address about progress in my country that it always saddens me that I must repeat my concerns about the way the issue of Kosovo is being handled.

Please let us all recall that Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) placed Kosovo under the interim administration of the United Nations, pending a comprehensive settlement endorsed by the Security Council. There is a limit to what and for how long Serbia must be held accountable for developments where it is asked to assume responsibility but without the necessary authority.

I look forward to the day when I can stand at this podium and report that we have resolved this issue—that we have found a mutually-acceptable compromise, not an imposed outcome where one side gets everything it has ever wanted, and the other side gets nothing. A maximalist, zero-sum approach is a solution with no future.

We are ready. We are committed. It is for others to provide grounds for optimism.

Mr. President,

The Republic of Serbia has two immediate parallel objectives: to secure a mutually-acceptable arrangement in Kosovo, which provides iron-clad guarantees for the Serbian communities, and, to accelerate our progress to membership of the European Union.

Both these objectives are achievable. And, it would be foolish for anyone to think that one objective would be sacrificed on the altar of the other. It is for others to decide whether they think that the achievement of these two objectives is for the good of the region and for stability. We are convinced that it is in everyone's interest.

I believe that Serbia has met the criteria to be invited to be a candidate for membership of the European Union. I also believe that my country is ready to start accession negotiations. And, I believe that if this were to occur, Serbia would, for the first time in twenty years, begin to believe that the EU actually sees Serbia as an integral part of a complete European Union.

I fervently believe that my country has set an example in the region in matters related to reconciliation and the establishment of rule of law and the fight against organized crime, as well as in building the administrative capacity to handle European norms.

Our battle against organized crime is a global one. We know that international organized crime wants to use our region of South Eastern Europe as a base to penetrate the EU. The Republic of Serbia has decided that it is a strategic priority and a national security priority that Serbia will help prevent this. Serbia is therefore fighting a battle to protect citizens of the European Union. It is actively engaged in a wider strategy to destroy the links between organized crime and international terrorism. We cooperate with all nations that share these objectives. We appeal to the entire region to join us in this battle.

I am therefore convinced that the presence of Serbia as a candidate, actively negotiating its accession, is an important asset for the European Union.

In this way, Serbia can continue to be an even more effective member of the United Nations, contributing fully and enthusiastically to the issues that touch common humanity.

Thank you.

