

STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. ALEKSANDAR VUCIC, PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, 22. SEPTEMBER 2016.

Tuesday, 27 September 2016

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address you today on behalf of the Republic of Serbia. First of all, I have to say that I am profoundly grateful to all of you who are present today this afternoon with us here. I know that you are not very much excited with my speech, but at least we need to hear from, to listen to, each other from time to time.

Excellencies,

This General Debate is an opportunity to highlight numerous achievements of the world Organization in the previous period. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for us to jointly re-affirm our commitment to the principles and goals of the UN Charter, as well as readiness to strengthen our collective decisiveness to engage actively and to do more on promoting peace and security, sustainable development and human rights, in the interest of humanity as a whole. The Republic of Serbia strongly supports the proposed theme for this year's general debate.

My country firmly believes that productive multilateralism is not only necessary, by also achievable if we all demonstrate readiness for joint engagement in the spirit of cooperation, compromise and flexibility in realization of the strategic vision of the better world for all of us. The political will is the first step in that direction, but it must be followed by both concrete activities and measures. Our deep belief is that this is the only way forward in the world of growing interdependence and complexity where common challenges require common solutions. We believe that peace is the foundation for all our common endeavours in fighting poverty, unemployment, organized crime, corruption, violence and all kinds of

extremism as we strive to build a better world based on universal respect for justice, rule of law and human rights and freedoms that are applicable for everyone, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

Now, it looks to me that I sound very familiar and many people mention the same things and I have an obligation to be as brief as possible and I will address you without reading my official speech and you are going to get the copies of my official speech. I will address you in a bit different way. And I am not going to use this teleprompter as many other smarter guys did during this conference. I need to say that, coming from a relatively small country in the Western Balkans from the heart of Europe and representing today a proud, dignified and freedom-loving people, I am very proud to be here to have an opportunity to say that. I am very proud to see people here in this great hall who want to hear even us from small countries, coming from small nations, because there are no reasons to address our public audience to gain some political points, to obtain some political points; we have, I think, enough votes to represent in a very legitimate way our people. I want to say that we heard a lot of great words from the representatives of big powers here in the General Assembly of the United Nations, but what we did not hear even this time...we did not hear about real solutions of some very important topics, of some very important issues. First of all, we did not hear almost anything about comprehensive solutions of the migrant crisis that almost the entire world is facing. And coming from a very small country from the Balkans I have to say that we are waiting for a proposal that the big powers will make for all us. And we would always agree with them and we would be ready to do our job together with them. Even though my country is not a member State of the European Union, we are ready to participate in that quota system, but actually nobody within the European Union accepted that system and now we do not know what our policy is on that, because there are different policies between different countries which share the same values, but we see completely different solutions with no ideas how to overcome all the bumps on the road to the future. Also I have to add that the migrant crisis is not finished, not finished at all; it is just the beginning of that crisis and today Serbia is facing many more difficulties that it used to be a year ago. Today we have more than 7 000 people within our borders, Bulgaria has the same number. Those people can't go anywhere else because all the others have already closed their borders. And I have a question for all of you: Is there any common solution for us, is there anything we can provide together or should we take some steps for ourselves and by ourselves? O.K. We'll do it, but we'll always be ready to wait for those common comprehensive solutions from the European Union, as well as from the United Nations. It's not going to be stopped in few days, few weeks or few months. I want to draw your attention to a number of other issues. You know that we have faced many difficult issues in the last 25 years and if you analyze the last 100 year, I think that we did not skip a single war from the First Balkan War to the latest wars of the 1990s. I hope that we'll do that in the future, that we will be strong enough, have enough strength to overcome all the disputes and do something better for our people and for our economic development. To tell the truth, we recently succeeded in delivering in that field. For the first time in our contemporary history, we have a surplus in our budget and, after many crisis years, we have a growth rate of 3 per cent this year and we expect an even bigger and better growth rate in the years to come. When I say that, of course, it's not comparable with some countries coming from Asia and Africa [that have bigger growth rates, as I was told by] my friend, the Prime Minister of Mauritius, but it is still better than the average growth rate in Europe. And we are very proud to say that today. But at the same time, why I insisted on different issues: we are once again facing instability in the region which might put

in jeopardy almost every single accomplishment that we made so far. And I've been insisting on that over the last two years and, to tell the truth, we got a lot of support from the UN, we got a lot of support from all our friends, from the West, from the East, but still the situation in the Western Balkans has not been improved and that's why we do worry a lot and that's why I think that we need to invest even more, more effort, more time and more political will to overcome all the difficulties and all the disputes and all the quarrels and clashes from the past. I need to add that we are facing some of the most terrible insults coming out of some of our neighbours. I am not going to say a single bad word about them, I am not going to reply to them today. They said of my people and of my country that we are a handful of misérables, a handful of poor misérables. Nobody said that about any single country, any single nation in the world and our decision was not to respond to them. And we'll keep on that track and we won't do that to anybody else, even though we'll be insulted and offended again. Why did I say that? I said that because I think that the Western Balkans needs peace and stability; it needs a better understanding and real reconciliation in the future. Did we succeed in that in the last 20-25 years? I dare to say no, not at all. Hatred is even bigger among the peoples of some countries of the Western Balkans. But, anyway, we succeeded in preserving peace, calmness and tranquility. And we'll do our best to keep the pace and to insist on economic development, on preserving and developing our political relations in a way different from what it used to be. I have to add once again that we are very thankful to those countries, to those nations, that were not on our side but on the side of international public law, that did not support the unilaterally declared independence of our southern Province of Kosovo and Metohija. We are profoundly grateful even to you, Member States, that were on the side of the UN Charter. I have to add that we are persistent in keeping up the pace in our dialogue and conversation with Kosovo Albanians, because we need to live together, we need to create our common future and these are the talks facilitated by the European Union and we are very committed and dedicated to carry on with these talks. And we will always be ready to inform you about the results of this conversation and hope that the situation in Kosovo and Metohija won't be a source of instability in the future. That's at least one good conclusion from my speech today. There are several other issues, there are different dangers we are being faced with, many things that can put in jeopardy our sustainable development in the future, there is an ever greater number of terrorist cells in different countries in the Western Balkans and together with the entire world we'll be doing our best to fight that terrible evil and that's why we joined the anti-ISIS coalition and I am proud to say that we'll always be on that better side of the world, the side of the world that will keep peace, keep stability and the values that the modern world has been fighting for. I want to add once again that as Serbia we'll do our best to protect our own national and State interests, just as we always do our best to listen to the other small and relatively small countries, because we need to unite ourselves. Otherwise, I am very much afraid that our voice won't be heard in the future.

Thanks a lot and I think that at least you should be satisfied that you can always, at least in the last 3 to 4 years, you can always hear that Serbia is an anchor of stability and we are proud to be a pillar of stability in the Western Balkans. That will remain the case in the next 5, 10, 20 years and I hope that we'll be able to create a better world, better cooperation, particularly between us smaller countries of the world and we'll do our best at least from our side to listen to you, to see what we can do together.

Thank you, Excellencies, once again. I was really honoured to have had a chance to address you.