

Check against delivery

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA H.E. MR. BOYKO BORISOV AT THE
GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 73RD SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

NEW YORK, 28 SEPTEMBER 2018

Madam Chair

Secretary General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think we should well appreciate that this year's theme of the General Debate is on *Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies*. It is comprehensive and provides food for thought on the direction in which our world should develop, and with it – this international organization.

Global leadership is, first and foremost, a great responsibility. In order for us to achieve sustainability and standards of life that uphold the principle of dignity for every human being on this planet, it is absolutely crucial that we demonstrate our commitment and unity in facing the challenges of our time. I am convinced that we are all aware we need to act with determination and unity in sharing the responsibility to ensure peace, equality and sustainability of our communities.

The Republic of Bulgaria has continuously and actively worked for sustaining a world order, based on rule of law and for reaffirming the principles of multilateral cooperation. And that is why I would like to highlight that it is the destiny of the United Nations to play a central role in this, and we actively support this organization in its efforts.

The main global challenges such as conflict resolution and peace-keeping, strengthening global security and stability, countering climate change, terrorism and ever-deepening inequality, cannot be addressed by one single country alone. They require shared responsibility and everyone's contribution.

Global peace and security depend on the stability and sustainable development of the different parts of our globalized world. Every country – large or small – has the responsibility and the capacity to make a significant contribution towards security and prosperity in the region where it is located.

For example, this past Monday, at the high-level event on the global drug problem, organized by President Trump, every participating country made a firm commitment to fight this global scourge. It was not by chance that Bulgaria was one of the co-hosts of this event. We have already pledged our commitment and have proven through our actions the commitment to fighting against this problem. My country can well serve as a positive example. In order to achieve peace, security and stability, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, we all need to take more of these actions.

The United Nations plays an integral part in promoting the fair use of global opportunities to the benefit of all. Inclusive and sustainable global growth underpins the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Achieving the universal-in-nature, and closely interlinked, Sustainable Development Goals is the key to addressing the current global challenges.

The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the first half of this year, invested considerable efforts to achieve marked progress and consensus among member-states along the main goals of the Agenda.

We are proud that, within our 6-month Presidency tenure, the European Union adopted the mandate to start negotiations for the signing of a new partnership agreement with 79 countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The negotiations aim to achieve an up-to-date and dynamic partnership with these countries as an important instrument in tackling global challenges ranging from poverty and inequality to promoting peace and sustainable development for all.

Madam Chair,

Please allow me to highlight some of the idiosyncrasies of the region where my country, Bulgaria, is located. This year we mark the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, which serves to remind us of the importance of the Balkans in the past, and how relevant they are in the present day. They have often been the source of conflicts and, to this day, the embers of some of them are still burning.

In spite of all the circumstances and obstacles before them, countries of South Eastern Europe, and especially those from the Western Balkans, have managed to achieve remarkable progress on important and much debated issues, which took several decades to reach the current state of affairs. That is why we should not stall any further in offering the unequivocal political support of the international community for each state or initiative that deserves this support.

Compelling proof of the progress made by the Western Balkans is the recent signing of the agreements between Sofia and Skopje, and between Athens and Skopje. These agreements are crucial steps towards stability and security in South Eastern Europe, as well as towards the Euro-Atlantic prospects of the Western Balkans. The agreement between Podgorica and Pristina on the border demarcation that just came into force is also a significant milestone. These

documents not only show, but also generate, the new spirit of relations between and among the countries of this region.

I will give you one more example. Based on the historic opportunity that the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU offered us, Bulgaria initiated a process that put the Western Balkans back on the agenda of European politics. The opportunities for cooperation and participation of countries from outside the region in the construction of the new Balkan infrastructure has already started attracting interest and investments.

An important and emblematic expression of this process was the Leaders' Summit of the member-states of the EU and the Western Balkan countries in our capital Sofia in May this year. This was the first meeting of its kind after the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. Connectivity in all its dimensions was the focus of discussions, as well as the joint response of the young and relatively small Balkan states to the common challenges we all face to security - such as irregular migration, organized crime and terrorism, hybrid threats, cyber-security and misinformation. The so-called Sofia Declaration that was adopted at the Summit confirmed the European prospects of the region and turned them into an achievable goal.

We are aware that this is just the beginning of a new path that is both encouraging, but neither easy, nor quick. However, the stakes are high. Not only for the citizens of these countries, not only for their EU neighbors and friends, but also for the global processes for economic and political strengthening and development. We cannot leave "blank spots" marked by lagging development, weak economies and societies susceptible to the present global threats.

Literally, in two days' time, the citizens of our South Eastern neighbor will have to take a landmark decision about their future and namely, to reaffirm the compromise achieved with neighboring Greece, which will clear their path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. This is a truly historic moment. It is now or never. And that is exactly why we need to support them in their strife for taking this new decision for their country.

Two of our other neighbors are facing a very difficult dilemma. We support the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, we welcome their determination towards normalizing their bilateral relations with the help of EU mediation. At the same time, we deem the potential “re-tailoring of borders” a non-viable solution.

Important elections are coming up in October of this year for Bosnia and Herzegovina. They will be a key test of the unity of the country and its determination to progress further along the path of European integration.

As you can see, the conditions in this part of Europe are very dynamic and fraught with important events. They will determine the direction of development of the region for many years to come. And with that, to a large extent, the state of the EU.

What we have managed to achieve so far, as a result of our work on the main priorities of Bulgarian foreign policy, is part of our contribution to peace and security on the European continent and beyond.

The generally optimistic prospects for the Western Balkans and the South-East European region, however, are in drastic contrast to the conflicts that surround them from three sides: in the Ukraine – to the North-East; in the Middle-East – to the South-East; and in Libya to the South.

Direct consequences of the conflicts around the world are the migration flows and the rising threat of terrorism. I will broach these topics later.

I would like to draw your attention to the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine first. Over the past four and a half years, according to data from the UN, the total number of victims of the conflict

exceeds ten thousand people, and of the wounded – 24 thousand. Special cause for concern is the deteriorating humanitarian and environmental situation in Donbas.

Alongside these dire statistics, there is no real progress in implementing the Minsk agreement, which we think is the only way to find a peaceful and sustainable solution to the conflict. The existing differences in terms of deployment of international peace-keeping forces in Eastern Ukraine under the auspices of the UN have also not been overcome.

We, the leaders of the member-states of this international organization share the responsibility to establish a peaceful, fair and sustainable world order that rests on the principles of the UN Charter. I want to call on you all to double our efforts in achieving peace and stability in the Ukraine, without infringing upon the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

The situation in Syria remains dramatic. In spite of the efforts of the international community, military activities in the country continue, leading to an increasing number of casualties among the civilian population, as well as to thousands of new emigrants. As a country that is geographically close to Syria, Bulgaria supports efforts to prevent further escalation of the military conflict. Pursuant to this, we support the continuation of political dialogue and the intra-Syria negotiations with the aim of finding a permanent political solution to the Syrian crisis.

We support the launch of international initiatives to create conducive conditions for restarting the Middle-East Peace Process via bilateral talks. We think that this is the way to achieve a final agreement, based on the principle of two states, coexisting in peace and stability. That is why we evaluate highly and strongly support the efforts of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle-East Peace Process H.E. Nickolay Mladenov, aiming to improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible.

In terms of Libya, Bulgaria supports the UN Action Plan and the efforts of the Mission of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, whose primary task is stabilizing the country and reaching national conciliation in the context of political and institutional fragmentation. We support the agreements reached by the four key political leaders for conducting presidential and parliamentary elections.

* * *

It is impossible to stop all conflicts, but I would nevertheless like to say a few words about another important issue related to peace and security in the world:

We are of the opinion that the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan for the Iranian Nuclear Program continues to be a key element of the international security architecture. We also support all efforts for the full, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of permanent peace in the region of North-Eastern Asia.

Madam Chair,

The migration flows and the refugee crises are a global phenomenon. They are consequence of a myriad of political and socio-economic factors, but most of all, of the conflicts in the various parts of the world. Let me underscore – clearly and right from the start – that irregular migration is a serious challenge before our societies, with reference to security and stability.

We need to strengthen cooperation with all countries of origin, transit and destination in order to reach a sustainable and permanent solution. It needs to fully guarantee human rights and also the sovereign right of states to guarantee the security of their borders.

The efforts of the international community need to predominantly focus on the main causes for migration – political, socio-economic and natural.

We need to pay special attention to the different dimensions of development and the integral link between development and security. If we do not back these efforts with active and mediation and peace-keeping, and if we do not manage to resolve the burning conflict and the prevention of future ones, chances for success are doomed. And this is where I see the crucial and unique role of the United Nations, which, if there is sufficient political will on the side of member-states, can and should be strengthened.

During its Presidency of the Council of the EU, Bulgaria took active part in the process of negotiating the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The finalizing of the language of the Compact is an achievement of multilateral cooperation and I am confident that its adoption at the inter-governmental conference in Morocco this year will set the ground for the successful implementation of the first global framework for cooperation in the area of international migration.

We also welcome the completion of the consultations on the text of the Global Refugee Compact, which exemplifies a comprehensive response to large-scale migration flows, based on the principle of shared responsibility.

* * *

Recently, we have seen an increase in the number of terrorist attacks all over the world, as well as an increase in the number of innocent victims of terrorism. The irregular migration waves allow for the infiltration of our countries and communities by former fighters from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other places, including trained members of terrorist organizations such as IS and Al-Qaida.

Bulgaria categorically condemns all forms and expressions of terrorism, no matter the cause for which they have allegedly been perpetrated. They undermine peace, security, social and economic development of states. The effective response to this phenomenon requires the coordinated efforts of the entire international community.

That is why we support the United Nations in its capacity as a universal organization which possesses the full range of instruments to lead and coordinate the process, alongside facilitating the exchange of experience among the regional organizations and the national agencies, and assists the streamlining of their efforts.

We support the work of the Office of the UN to counter terrorism and the specific steps taken to intensify the operations of the Organization along this line, including support for the organization of the high-level meeting of heads of national counter-terrorism agencies.

A priority task is to take measures to protect young people from radicalizing or joining terrorist groups, as well as neutralizing the influence of persons and organizations instigating terrorist attacks.

Madam Chair,

This year we mark the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Bulgaria will, for the first time, present its candidacy for membership in the UN Human Rights Council. We rely on the support of member-states. This is not an end in itself for us, but rather an expression of our consistent policy of protection and assertion of human rights in Bulgaria and at the global level. Our Presidency of the Council of the EU gave Bulgaria the opportunity to showcase its contribution to various aspects of the protection of human rights. We intend to continue to share our best practices as a member of the UN Human Rights Council.

The values that give meaning to any political effort subsume the Past, Present and Future. This allows us to better comprehend and appreciate our present efforts.

There is a moment in Bulgaria's history which we are justly proud of. 75 years ago, in the darkest of years during World War II, Bulgaria's citizens, the church and the enlightened leaders and intellectuals stood up to the attempts to deport close to fifty thousand Bulgarian Jews to the

death camps. And they managed to prevent it from happening. Achieved at a time when Nazi Germany had subordinated and occupied almost all of Europe.

I am sharing the story of the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews because it carries a very strong message relevant to the Present and all people who feel threatened. It shows that humaneness and courage can win over power and irrationality, and save lives. It reminds us that we should never cease to fight for human life and the right causes.

The salvation of the Bulgarian Jews is an example much needed today to reassure us that values are not a forgotten category, but a chance for a better future.

The Bulgarian example should become known to more people so that it can give courage to others around the world who are currently fighting to defend theirs and others' lives, dignity, and human rights. It is our mission at present to not allow the return of xenophobia and anti-semitism, or the irreverence for the right to live, based on race, ethnicity or other factors. We Bulgarians know that it is possible and that it has happened before.

To guarantee peace and prosperity around the world is our main task. I am convinced that this is attainable not through arms or battles, but with more humaneness and a greater sense of responsibility. We also need more than ever to strengthen the role and authoritativeness of the United Nations in its global operations.

I am confident that with efforts and good will on the part of all member-states, this grand goal can be achieved.

Thank you, Madam Chair.