

**Statement by President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić at the
General Debate of the 78th Session of the United Nations General
Assembly**

21 September 2023, New York

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I stand before you as the representative of a free and independent country, the Republic of Serbia, which is on its EU accession path, but which at the same time is not ready to turn its back on traditional friendships it had been building for centuries. I want to raise the voice on behalf of my country, but also on behalf of those who today, 78 years after the establishment of the UN, truly and equally believe that the principles of the UN Charter are the only substantial defense of the world peace, right to freedom and independence of nations and countries, but more than that, they are the pledge of the mere survival of the human civilization. New global wave of wars and violence that are impacting the foundations of the international security is a painful consequence whose cause lies in abandoning the Principles envisaged in the UN Charter.

All of us, speaking in this renowned Organization, speak about our own problems, confronting often with a real and imaginary enemy, patronizing our own public, telling fairytales of the future with insufficient realistic view on the issues. What does the future of the world look like? Even though all of us were listening to the words of the Secretary General, not many actually heard. And almost not a single world's news conveyed his words of warning. Nevertheless, in the era of social networks dominance, when only important thing is to get one more "like", in the era when each pet gets more attention than children, it is no wonder that we cannot recognize the dangers that are in front of us.

As the president of one not so big country, I cannot, and I have no right to speak about relations between great powers. It is neither my job, nor I could do that, but I can and I will speak about how inobservance of the international public law can bring horrible consequences.

The attempt of cutting my country into pieces, that had formally started in 2008 by the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and Metohija has not ended yet. Precisely the violation of the UN Charter in case of Serbia was one of the visible precursors of numerous problems we are all facing today, and that go far beyond the borders of my country and scopes of the region I come from.

Broadly observed – since we last met in this hall-the world is neither a better nor a safer place. Quite the opposite. Global peace and stability remain under acute threat. We continue to face problems related to energy security, financial instability, as well as security and disruptions in food and medication supply chains. Not only have we not found solutions to many problems,

but they have become more numerous, and some of them have even grown more complex. I also spoke about how nobody here listens to anyone and does not strive for real agreements, and in the meantime, we started to talk even less and less. It is as if virtually all, guided solely by their own interests, entrenched in their positions, have given up on seeking compromise solutions.

Distinguished Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While for three days in a row we pledge from this place to respect of principles and rules of the UN Charter, precisely violation of the respective is rooted in most of the problems in international relations, and implementation of dual standards is an open invitation for all those who strive to achieve their interests through war and violence, by violating norms of international law but also basic human moralities.

All the speakers so far - and I believe all who will speak after me- spoke about the necessity of changes in the world, underlining their country as the example of morality and commitment to the law and world justice. Today, I will not speak a lot in superlative about my country, about the growth of salaries and pensions, about hundreds of kilometers of constructed highways and railroads, newly built hospitals and schools, science-technology parks, the artificial intelligence institute, because it is a natural thing that I protect its interests and that I love it more than anything in the world, but I will speak about principles, which had been violated and which brought us to the situation in which we are today, and not by the small ones, who are often the target of the attack, but by the most powerful countries in the world. Especially those who gave themselves the right to lecture, each from its own angle, on politics and moral to the whole world.

Here, in this hall, only two days ago, we could hear from the President of the United States the most important principle in relations between the countries- the respect for their territorial integrity and sovereignty, and only as the third most important factor, he mentioned human rights. And, it seemed to me that everybody in this hall could support that. I, as the President of Serbia, supported that with unhidden jubilation. The only problem in all that was a fact that few hours after his speech I had to see the President of the so-called “Kosovo”, who is considered by the most powerful part of the West the president of an independent country, originated, by the way, by the secession of the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

At the same time, only a few meters away from this hall, the German Minister said that Germany firmly observed the UN Charter and UN decisions and documents, and that it would never give up on it. All that would be nice, if it were true. Namely, almost all western powers brutally violated both the UN Charter and the UN Resolution 1244, which had been passed in this renowned Organization, as they denied and violated precisely those principles they are defending today, and it happened 24 and exactly 15 years ago. For the first time, unprecedented in the world history, the most powerful 19 countries made the decision, without involvement of the UN Security Council, I repeat, without any decision by the UN Security Council, to brutally attack and punish a sovereign country on the European soil, as they had said, to prevent the humanitarian disaster.

They didn't laugh out loud when Russian President used the very same words, justifying his attack against Ukraine. They forgot that they themselves had used the same narrative, the same words and the same explanations. Whereby, I would like to inform you that Serbia had not stepped its foot in the territory of some other country, nor it jeopardized its existence; but 24 years ago, the most powerful and the strongest 19 had no mercy with small Serbia. Even when they had finished this job, job, they said that the issue of Kosovo is a democratic issue and that

it would be resolved in accordance with the UN Charter and other international law documents. And then, contrary to all, but absolutely all documents of the international public law, it occurred to them in 2008 to support the independence of the so-called “Kosovo”.

The illegal decision on secession of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia, was made a decade after the war conflict in our country had ended. Without a referendum or any other democratic form for declaring their stances for the citizens of Serbia or at least in Kosovo and Metohija itself. This decision was made in a moment when Serbia had the government committed to European and Euro Atlantic integration, and when - including in its composition the Province of Kosovo and Metohija, a full-fledged member of the United Nations, but also of Council of Europe, the OSCE and many other international organizations. Nevertheless, it did not prevent legal and political violence (and I could use a much harsher term) coming from those who are today at the forefront in lecturing from this place.

Pointless and meaningless explanations, like police terror that Serbian authorities had carried out in its southern Province a decade earlier, humanitarian crisis, expelling of the local Albanian population, were only a drop that spilled over the glass of lies and nonsense, in order to justify the violence against a sovereign country, and in order to undermine its integrity.

Namely, since the moment of the victory of those 19 against small Serbia, 70% of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija have left their thresholds, and there are by 300.000 Albanians more than there have ever been in Kosovo and Metohija. Well, that much about the law, that much about the justice.

Nevertheless, worse than anything is that all those who committed aggression against the Republic of Serbia, lecture today about territorial integrity of Ukraine, as if we didn't support the integrity of Ukraine, and we do support it and we will keep supporting it, because we do not change our politics and principles, regardless of centuries-long traditional friendship with the Russian Federation. To us, every violence is the same, every violation of the UN Charter is the same, regardless of the strength of the power that exerts it or inevitably similar excuses it makes for its illegal and immoral behavior.

But when we ask them about the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, and about what they had done to my country, the answer is the one that all of you, representatives of small countries in the world, heard on countless of occasions: do not go back in the past, look towards the future because it is the only way for your country to make progress. When it comes to the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Serbia and any other country, all of us are entitled to speak about it from this podium, at least a bit more than they are.

I am the President of Serbia in my second presidential term; on countless of occasions I was under different political pressures, and I am a political veteran, and what I will tell you today is the most important for me. Principles do not change from one circumstance to another. Principles do not apply only on the strong ones, they apply to all. If that's not the case, then, they are no longer principles. And that is why I believe that in the modern world there will either be principles, and the same rules will apply to all, or, as the world, we will end up in the deepest divisions in our history, in the most difficult conflicts and in problems we will not manage to cope with.

Another important thing, peace has become a forbidden word, because all of them have their favorites and their culprits. And the only value that remained to great powers are precisely the principles, but the false ones. As long as they are fine with them, they will call upon them. First

time - as it was in the case of Serbia- they disagreed with the principles, law and rules, law, justice and principles suffered.

Today, in Kosovo and Metohija, southern Province of the Republic of Serbia, the blunt violence is taking place, exerted against the Serbs by the separatist authorities of Albin Kurti.

Only last week, after who knows which failed round of the dialogue in Brussels, Pristina prime minister, Mr. Albin Kurti, after rejecting the European proposal for de-escalation, addressed the public in front of one of the main buildings of the European Union and in front of the millions of viewers of the media that were present conveyed to not so many reaming Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija that the Serbs will, I quote “suffer and pay for the mistake they made”. Is there any possible worse mocking humanity, international order based on the rules and international community, than these words? Unfortunately, it is possible. Only one day later, as we sit in this hall, a new contingency of Serbs is being taken to Kurit’s prisons, apprehended according to fabricated accusations, as a part of his terror campaign. So, much worse are the actions continuously done by Kurti’s extremist regime in the past 20 months, and which in practice, together with repeated accelerated displacement of the remaining Serbs, are turning into a crawling ethnic cleansing in the heart of Europe. You can conclude by yourself how far Kurti’s regime’s cynicism goes from the following sentence: - Since the European Union and the US State Secretary Antony Blinken issued a statement in early June, condemning unilateral action of the so-called “government of Kosovo”, ethnically motivated attacks against Serbs in our southern Province raised by 50%, while at the same period, Pristina authorities made even 22 new escalatory moves. Serbian boys Stefan Stojanovic and Milos Stojanovic, who are 11 and 21 years old, were wounded on the Christmas Eve by the members of the so-called Kosovo security forces, in whose equipping take part some of the attendees in this hall, knowing quite well that is deeply illegal and that the mere existence of the KSF is contrary to the UN SC Resolution 1244. Seven innocent civilians were shot by the representatives of the so-called “Kosovo” institutions, disruption of supplying of hospitals, election voting bans only for Serbs, entire economic blockade for Serbian goods, attacks against churches, graveyards, schools are a part of the sad daily life of my people in this part of our territory, parted by the violent secession contrary to the UN Charter.

And you wouldn’t believe it, even though there is not a single wounded Albanian, not a single apprehended or injured Albanian...guess what: it is the fault of both sides. Unlike 1999, when Belgrade and other cities in my country were bombed, leaving the bloody track from several thousand dead civilians and soldiers, in scenes that pretty much resemble those that we, unfortunately, see today in different parts of the world when an obvious terror, which they themselves say reminds of what happened to Albanians- happens against Serbs, there is no humanitarian disaster, there is no call for action, there is nothing. They are only worried now, shrugging their shoulders, but if they have to make any decisions, it will always be, as they put it the fault of “both sides”.

And in such a world, I believe that one small Serbia, by raising its voice and fighting for universal values of principles of inviolability of internationally recognized borders, territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence, gives the example of the fight for the right, the one that was abolished here, in this building, and protects the principles the world should be made of, with its not such a big strength, but with its paramount decisiveness and courage. We did not change the principles for the purpose of daily politics and our own needs. And just like we preserve the integrity of Serbia, we defend the integrity of each UN member state.

It is only a bit sad that all the big ones, who are not interested in the law and justice, call upon different principles in different circumstances the principles they find the most suitable at that

particular moment. When one follows such politics, when there is no morality in the world politics, then it is clear that we are about to enter the era of big divisions and big conflicts. And not only political and economic, but military ones, as well.

And precisely in this difficult situation, the United Nations is the last substantial platform that brings us all together, regardless of all our differences and divisions. I believe that the commitment to peace and development, the desire to resolve disputes through dialogue, to find common ways to end human suffering and to ensure a more prosperous and stable future are precisely what unites us. That is why we extend full support to all important reform processes of the UN Organization itself, including the initiatives of the UN Secretary-General, aiming to further strengthen the role of this most important global organization.

For preservation of global peace and so that we all do not disappear in a Darwinist conflict led by great powers, it is necessary to join our forces, just like 78 years ago, in common fight for international order based on the UN Charter. It would be much wiser and better for our children to do the respective before the World War than after it, once it is too late.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Respecting the UN Charter is not a choice, it is an obligation. After all, like I have already said by mentioning some names, this is what we had the opportunity to hear during the previous presentations of most of my colleagues while talking, among other issues, about the topic that is still dominant in all forums - the conflict in Ukraine. I will agree with them when it comes to the necessity of respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, which the Republic of Serbia has been consistently showing from the beginning. We have been making such appeals continuously for decades, but with a significant difference - Serbia supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all UN member states. I repeat, ALL member states.

Therefore, it is hard for me to understand how some are still not acting in a consistent manner when it comes to the need to respect the territorial integrity of Serbia and how they fail to understand that the selective application of principles leads to pronounced divisions, a lack of solidarity and mutual understanding.

However, I want to thank wholeheartedly to the global majority. Significantly more than one half of the UN member states in our example supports the UN Charter and they do not support the violent partition of mu country. I am glad that for the majority of UN member states double standards are out of the question. We are deeply grateful to all of you who selflessly support our efforts to preserve territorial integrity, thus demonstrating your commitment to the UN Charter. By safekeeping your borders today, you safekeep your borders and you preserve peace. On your behalf, as well as on our behalf, we will continue, year after year, to underline that defending the principles is the same as defending the freedom, independence and peace.

Additionally, my country will continue fighting for the dialogue and for finding compromise solution for relations in Kosovo and Metohija, whose inhabitants we equally respect, regardless of their nationality.

It often seems to us that the discussion with Kurti's government is more like a monologue than the dialogue, because it is hard to explain why after more than 10 years after the signing of the Brussels Agreement and taken obligations, the Community of Serb Majority Municipalities has not been formed.

The Republic of Serbia, its Government and all the institutions are working in their full capacity on preservation of the dialogue with the Pristina, under the EU auspices.

It is our task.

The dialogue is possible only in case that all of us- including also the European facilitators- adhere firmly to what had been agreed.

Misbalance by which Serbia has to make concessions all the time is not leading towards the solution. Quite the contrary.

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I believe that not only our trust is let down by such moves of Pristina, but also the trust of the bigger part of the international community.

Like I have already sat at the beginning of my speech, Serbia is on its European path, ready to change, reform itself and to make progress. Today, Serbia has very good cooperation with the USA, in almost all areas, and we believe that our relations will only be better in the future. At the same time, Serbia will cherish its big and traditional friendships in all continents, while being proud of its good relations with all the nations and countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We do not divide people by the color of their skin or their religious affiliation, that is why our relations with the People's Republic of China, many Arab and other Muslim countries are at the highest historical level.

Believing that the dialogue is the only way for finding the compromise solution, Serbia remains committed to this process in the aim of providing peaceful coexistence of Serbs and Albanians. Peace and stability of the region have no alternative. It is with that belief that we approach to all discussions facilitated by the EU.

As many of you maybe know, different interpretations of history are the cause of many disagreements and open issues in our region. I believe in future, and I believe that that, by using joint efforts, we still have the capacity and ability to try to overcome differences and focus on what connects us – care for wellbeing of our nations. We want to build bridges, not walls. We need to look towards the future. We need to move forward, to use every chance for economic growth, connectivity and exchange of ideas. Today, we have common toll collection from Belgrade almost to the Adriatic Sea, and soon we'll have it to the Aegean Sea. We open borders in the Balkans, we open labor market and enable free flow of people, goods and capital.

Precisely this was the guiding star and initiator of the "Open Balkan" Initiative, which has given concrete results so far and strengthened regional ownership of the processes of the economic connectivity of the region. The "Open Balkan" improved also the political atmosphere. We have such approach to all our neighbors and our key interest is to preserve stability in the region and turn towards as intensive cooperation as possible in all areas. These processes are certainly inseparable part of our strivings to become a full-fledged member of the European Union, which is at the same tie one of the key priorities of our foreign policy.

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This priority certainly does not exclude our commitment for cooperation development and deepening of relations with our traditional friends from all parts of the world, where we remain reliable and responsible partner. We will strive to strengthen existing and build new friendships, both bilaterally and through participation in initiatives and fora of different regions all over the world. The latest confirmation that the geographic distance should not be a barrier for cooperation is recent accession of the Republic of Serbia to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia- TAC.

Additionally, we are proud for being given a unique opportunity that the spirit of friendship I speak about is to be felt in Belgrade, which will host the Specialized Exhibition EXPO 2027. We are grateful to all those who supported us and had faith in us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After long negotiations and with a lot of optimism, the 2030 Agenda – A Plan of Action for People, Planet and Prosperity was adopted in this room, by which we pledged that “no one will be left behind”.

Half way to the set deadline for meeting the goals of the Agenda, there is still a glimpse of hope that we will be able to fulfill given promise, although there are many reasons for concern. Even beside the progress that was made in certain areas, unfortunately we are still facing the basic existential problems like poverty, hunger and inequality. To make things even more difficult, solving these problems is additionally burdened by complicated situation in most of the world economies and current geopolitical developments. We need understanding of mutual connectivity of all these challenges, that require common action, solidarity and more efficient multilateralism.

Serbia puts maximum efforts in order to secure stable and safe future, initiating at the same time policies based on sustainable development goals. Among some of the results so far are the following: developing instruments for involving principle that “no one is left behind” into our legislative and strategic documents, as well as participation in global initiatives and their implementation at national levels in areas of sustainable food systems, transformation of education systems and urban development.

We have lived to see the fourth industrial revolution and new technologies as a development opportunity that we must not miss. And that is why we continue with investment into infrastructure, economic reforms and creation of better business environment. Digitization and education are among our key priorities.

The necessity of finding new sources of growth has also been recognized. That is why our future activities are focused on innovation, research and development and creative industries. Serbia is the first country in the Southeast Europe region that joined the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence and adopted development strategy in this area back in 2019. Bio4 Campus is being built; it is a unique multidisciplinary complex for research and development in natural science, which should become one of the key bioeconomic hubs in Europe.

We firmly believe that knowledge and science play one of the key roles in accelerating activities towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, I am proud that at the proposal of the Republic of Serbia and like-minded countries, the UNGA adopted a Resolution declaring the period from 2024 to 2033 the International Decade of Science for Sustainable Development. We believe that this decade must be used to put all science capacities into service of development and strengthening each individual and protection of our planet, because nature shows us day after day how much we are in debt with it.

We do all this for future generations. I believe that involvement of the young ones into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is an important prerequisite for its success because, beyond any doubt, the young ones are the most important development engine of every society.

Excellencies,

I believe that we are all aware that there is no development without peace. Just like Nelson Mandela said: “Peace is the greatest weapon for development that any person can have”. We must believe in that and work together on it. *Conditio sine qua non* is, first and foremost, conversation; to listen and to try to hear and understand each other. There is no alternative to peace.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to invite the representatives of all UN members states to take part in World Exhibition EXPO 2027 in Belgrade. Serbia’s capital, a cosmopolitan metropolis with two million inhabitants is your home and we extend the welcoming hand for participation in the freest and most diverse international exhibition so far. Come to Belgrade to celebrate the humanity together.

Thank you for your attention.