

GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 80th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

**S T A T E M E N T**

by

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to address this 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, a founding member of the United Nations and a freedom- and peace-loving country, proud of its history.

This year, we mark 8 decades of the existence of the world Organization, and during that period, the United Nations has provided a framework for dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among the nations, short of which it would not be possible to respond to the challenges of our day. Only by joint efforts, we can create a future featured by security and dignity.

This brings me, Ladies and Gentlemen, to the five essential principles that guide Serbia in its foreign-policy vision and constitute pillars in its international actions.

**I The United Nations is not a relic of the past; it is a compass for the future**

- Eighty years on, this is a moment for reflection, but also for candour.
- The UN should not be a stage where giants wrestle while smaller countries hold their breath. It should be a round table where every seat counts.
- Countries like ours, countries that belong to Global South, are too often treated as chess pieces. It's time to show that we can be conveners, innovators, and guarantors of cooperation.
- We may not have the loudest voice, but we often have the clearest vision – because we see both East and West at once.
- Our engagement with all partners does not mean blind agreement. It means respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the belief that dialogue is stronger than division.
- Serbia is a reliable, predictable partner – but reciprocity matters. We will defend our autonomy as firmly as we defend cooperation.

*The United Nations Charter was not written to serve one moment in history; it was written to withstand the tests of time. In a world facing deep geopolitical fractures, the United Nations Charter remains the only framework capable of holding us together. Serbia is not a buffer zone – it is a bridge. And bridges connect; they do not divide. Therefore, as the President of Serbia, for the first time, I would like to offer Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, as a place of dialogue for all the conflicts around the world. I believe that we will offer the best possible hospitality and absolute security for the participants.*

- The world is facing its deadliest surge in violence since World War II. In 2024, 61 armed conflicts erupted across 36 countries, the highest number in more than seven decades.
- The proliferation of misinformation, particularly via digital platforms, has fuelled distrust between countries, targeting elections, trade negotiations, and public sentiment.

*Serbia believes in pragmatic cooperation: finding common ground even where disagreements persist.*

- People around the world are frustrated with governments and businesses, and they want a better future for themselves and their families. The best way to deliver that is through collaboration across nations.

We live in times of the most difficult conflicts and the most difficult divisions within countries, continents and regions since the foundation of the United Nations. A particularly worrying thing is a fact that, provoked by different factors, we have the deepest and the most difficult divisions within each society, with, most often, extremely violent consequences of actions of mutual non-understanding, non-communicating and distancing from what used to be accepted as elementary decency and behavior, in both country to country and people to people relations. The world is divided - believe it or not - less by ideological, but much more by emotional differences, caused by undermining of countries, societies and elementary moral values. In each village and hamlet worldwide, and particularly with the members of the citizen alleged elite- at least it used to be the case, no matter who dies of natural causes, and especially if someone dies in an accident, or gets killed, the biggest part of the society felt the need to pay their respect to the deceased, even those who didn't think highly of the respective person during his or her lifetime. Today, we are witnessing the unprecedented wonder, a sick expression of joy for the crime committed against an innocent person. The example of Charlie Kirk is the best confirmation of that. He was savagely assassinated just because his killer didn't like his ideas. He was shot even after death by the same ones who had prepared political and media grounds for his assassination. And, please, do not be surprised because I'm speaking about this more than about big world conflicts; it is precisely that such a development devastates in a deepest and the clearest way the world political community much more than conflicts with clear and visible actors. In the era of social networks, in the era of freedom we have reached the point of the biggest unfreedoms and unambiguous limiting of freedoms of the others. How can it be possible that, let's say, ABC television host, gets bigger media attention in the US than the attempted assassination against, let's say, President Trump? Who are these shadow rulers who impact the key political movements and who want to run the world and each country individually, and, almost as a rule, without the people's will and legitimacy? They run all the processes and all of us because they're chosen by God, as they like to put it; the elite and not the people who are, I suppose, incapable of choosing their own path. Those are extremely dangerous things, which will lead to further dissolving of our societies and our countries, but also the overall world politics.

It was mostly spoken here about Palestine and Israel. Both are our friends. And I cannot easily- because of more "likes" on social networks, nor I want to take sides and speak about good and bad people, just because it brings us another point in daily politics. But, speaking of which, let me bring you back to the beginning of this part of my speech. Big pro-Palestinian demonstrations were held in Italy during the past weekend. People were shouting "Gaza, Gaza", but, at least in Milan, some of them didn't even think of Gaza. The only thing that was on their mind was demolishing and burning down of what the Italian people had created for centuries, just because it is popular to be against the government and take part in some kind of violence. And when, otherwise very composed, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni calls

such hooligans, rightly so, “thugs”, we all ask ourselves what the next stage would be like and what awaits us in the future.

During the past months, Serbia was facing unrests and attacks against the Constitutional Order. In spite of the violence exerted by the protesters, I tried to find the significant share of blame in myself, and in us running the country. I wanted to listen and I understood the message of the people in the streets. That is why - just like here at the United Nations I believe that the dialogue between the nations and countries has no alternative, I offered dialogue, an unconditioned discussion on all the topics of significance for our society, to people who think differently, and I am absolutely certain that in the upcoming period we will overcome all the difficulties from the past months.

- Progress on global challenges is uneven: financing is dwindling, the UN budget is constrained, and smaller nations often lack access to the tools and support that richer countries enjoyed, particularly in the energy transition.
- Climate change is not just a statistic for Serbia and the Balkans – it is a lived reality, marked by droughts, floods and energy insecurity.
- Sustainable economic growth is essential, not optional, for climate resilience and wellbeing.
- For us, partnerships are defined by commitment, not hierarchy. We are a place where East and West collaborate on concrete projects, from clean energy to infrastructure and digital transformation, and we will continue to build on this foundation.
- At a time when the UN seeks to inspire trust globally, these practical, results-driven partnerships strengthen confidence at home and abroad.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Alongside many other Member States, especially those who do not belong among great powers, Serbia is adamant in pointing to the importance of, and respect for, the fundamental principles and rules of the Charter of the United Nations. Perhaps it is only too proper to repeat today what we committed to 8 decades ago: the principles and rules of the Charter are valid equally for all States, large or small, for all political powers or levels of development.

With a feeling of deep pride, my country continues to commit to a consistent implementation of international norms notwithstanding the fact that it, too, is facing a lack of fairness and double standards. In words and deeds and on a number of occasions, Serbia has recommitted to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all United Nations Member States, the fundamental principles of the Charter. In doing so, my country expects all the States to respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Which, I have the pleasure to note, most of them do and to which I owe my profound gratitude. After all, as I said on many previous occasions, the respect of the Charter of the United Nations is not a matter of choice; rather than that, it is a universal and binding obligation of us all.

**II Territorial integrity is not a principle measured by power; it is the measure that restrains power.**

*If the principle of territorial integrity is applied selectively, it ceases to apply at all. Its violation in one place becomes justification for conflict everywhere. Undermining it does not create exceptions. Rather, like in the case of Serbia, it creates precedents. Dangerous ones.*

Serbia is well aware of the price paid in disregard of international law and multilateralism. Twenty-six years ago, my country fell prey to a brutal aggression by NATO. It opened a Pandora box of sorts whereby the very postulates of international law were unscrupulously undermined and the principle of territorial integrity brought into question. The consequences of such actions of those who considered themselves untouchable at the time are felt today as well.

Even though small in respect of global powers, Serbia is not deterred from commitment to the principles of international law. We firmly believe that they should be respected in every situation, without exception and selectivity. As a persistent drop can shape stones over time, so does our perseverance in defending universal norms help assert their durability. Serbia will continue advocating those principles, as the observance of the respective is the only reliable way to peace and stability.

This rostrum and this occasion are the best opportunity to reiterate that my country will never forget its history, its people, its sanctities. Kosovo and Metohija is an inseparable part of Serbia, the main pillar of its identity, culture and spiritual heritage. For us Serbs it is not only a piece of land, it is the cradle of our spirituality and our existence on that land over centuries.

Our concern is not only moral and historical; it is humane, too. It is with a heavy heart that I advise of the dramatic circumstances in which the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija live today. Day in and day out, they are denied basic human rights: the right to life, freedom of movement, the right to education and health protection, access to work place and property. They live in isolation, basic foods and medicines are in short supply, while children grow up in fear and uncertainty. Their situation is not only local by nature, it touches upon the conscience of the entire international community and is a test of its readiness to fend for the innocent and helpless.

We witness ethnic violence suffered by the Serbs almost every day. It is frightening in size and scope. The Serbs are physically attacked, intimidated, arrested unlawfully, their property is confiscated and their rights to language, education and cultural expression limited. The Serbs are often discriminated against, too; the practice sets the stage to make life in Serbian communities more difficult as they are denied basic services, taxed exorbitantly and erected hurdles and obstacles to. This is aimed at creating fear and pressure and, by extension, change the demographic picture and force the Serbs to flee Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia, therefore, calls on the international community to take concrete and resolute measures to stop the violence in order to ensure security and rights of all peoples in Kosovo and Metohija. Compassion is not good enough; we need deeds and protection mechanisms.

Notwithstanding the continuous, open and obvious violations of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244(1999), Serbia continues to believe in dialogue under the European Union auspices. It has no alternative and, if true and committed, it is the only way to a just and sustainable solution in line with international law and with full respect for mutual obligations. Just as in the past, my country will continue to fight for peace, patiently, emphatically and in good faith.

### **III The Balkans must not be a stage for the ambitions of others, but a space for shared responsibility**

*Thirty years after the conflicts, stability has become our highest value. The nations of the Balkans deserve the right to shape their future free from external patronage, through cooperation, mutual respect and regional ownership.*

Distinguished Colleagues,

Cooperation, dialogue and mutual confidence are perceived as main levers of international relations also on the regional level. We consider that our region should look to the future, while we continue to work to the benefit of all citizens and economic inter-linkage. To paraphrase Indira Gandhi who once said that one *cannot shake hands with a clenched fist*, let me say that Serbia will keep its ‘hand extended,’ the hand reaching over divisions and borders, devoted to stability and prosperity for all those who strive for a positive agenda and a vision of common European future.

The stability of our region is of paramount importance for us. As a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Agreement that we signed thirty years ago, we shall always work toward its full implementation and respect for the rights of all three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbs, Bosnians and Croats. Unilateral acts and the abuse of authority contrary to the letter of the Agreement are not conducive to peace and bring about new tensions. Only by the agreement of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s peoples and entities can the stability and functioning of that country be guaranteed.

Absence of dialogue and unilateral initiatives without agreement by all interested sides, in particular the initiatives that take advantage of international organizations, are but a step back to a painful past and create new divisions. Serbia will use all diplomatic means to prevent these activities from taking place as they undermine regional dialogue, the process of reconciliation and understanding. We shall not hesitate in our resolve to promote regional stability in an effort to contribute to global security.

For exactly 30 years now, and in this distinguished institution and everywhere else, a false campaign has been ongoing against both the Republic of Serbia and Republika Srpska, the entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina. All over the world, everywhere, countless times, you could hear how, as they use to say, from well-informed sources, they heard that it was only a matter of days before Serbia would attack someone in the region, and that Republika Srpska and its leadership would violate the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And all this time, it has been a lie—a real smoke screen—intended to enable international representatives, who are not elected by the people, to deal with legitimate representatives of the Serbian people, one of the three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, imposing sanctions against them, believe it or not, replacing them from the positions the people elected them to, and conducting criminal proceedings and issuing convictions for words spoken, for verbal offenses. Thus, all of you are witnesses to a fact that for 3.5 years since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, we have been hearing stories that we, as a Russian puppet, will attack someone in the region, which, of course, did not happen and will not happen. The only thing we have never heard is an apology from those who spread such falsehoods, and it is quite certain that we will never hear one. Let me reiterate, Serbia is a free, independent, and sovereign country that makes its own decisions independently. We are committed to our European path; we do not plan to attack anyone, but equally, we will not allow anyone else to threaten our freedom and our country.

#### **IV The world is changing and the United Nations must evolve to remain a pillar of global stability.**

*Reforming the United Nations is not simply an institutional task, it is a moral duty to safeguard the future of global peace and justice.* We are well aware of the need to reform the United Nations and revitalize its system in order to increase its credibility and shore up multilateralism so as to make our Organization more effective, just and close to the needs of its Member States. Also, the Security Council should become more effective in, and better adapted to, the pursuit of its primary goal of safeguarding international peace in order to reflect more accurately the reality of the present-day world. Africa, in particular, the youngest continent which comprises 54 States, must be better represented.

- Many countries rely on the UN for technical expertise, development funding, and guidance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Cuts to funding or reduced access to UN programs risk widening the gap between wealthy and developing nations.

As the UN looks for ways to reduce costs, we are happy to offer to host any of UN bodies, institutions, agencies in Serbia with the best possibility to continue being a bridge between developed and developing regions.

Serbia is situated at the crossroads of Europe, easily accessible to both East and West, and speaking about cost-effectiveness we are able to offer lower operational costs compared to Geneva, New York, or other big hubs.

- Belgrade offers modern facilities, reliable connectivity, and proven capacity to host large international events, for example, EXPO 2027.
- Hosting an agency in Belgrade strengthens the UN's presence in South-Eastern Europe, a region with transitional and developmental experience relevant to global priorities.
- This would expand the UN's geographic footprint, ensuring agencies are more representative and globally distributed.

#### **V Serbia will remain independent and will overcome internal challenges through the strength of its statehood tradition, focusing steadfastly on building a prosperous future**

- True sovereignty today is not insulation. It is the dignity to choose – to say yes on our own terms, and to use that choice for cooperation.

*Serbia's independence is not a privilege granted; it is a sovereign right exercised. And its sovereignty is not situational, it is foundational.*

Notwithstanding numerous global challenges, Serbia has remained on a steady course: its macroeconomic situation is stable and its economy continues to grow, which only shows how commitment to reforms and responsible economic policies lead to great results. Investments in infrastructure, energy transition and digitalization bear out my country's commitment to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda goals.

Let me take a moment, Ladies and Gentlemen, to inform you that in 2027 Serbia will host the specialized exhibition EXPO 2027. With a motto *Play for Humanity: Sport and Music for All*, this event will provide an opportunity for my country to show to the world the strength of our culture, sport and creativity as a universal language that transcends differences. This will be a moment in which, along with its partners, Serbia will build bridges of friendship and togetherness, promote understanding and open new horizons of cooperation.

Serbia's way is the way of development, progress and prosperity. And it is fully committed to becoming a full-fledged member of the European Union. This commitment, though, makes us no less devoted to promoting and deepening cooperation with countries from other parts of the world maintaining and cherishing, all along, our traditional friendships and relations of trust in the East. Strengthening overall bilateral relations with key actors of the international community and with our European partners tops our agenda. Also, Serbia has raised in the past several years the level of cooperation with numerous countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and played in that way a respectable role on the global stage. I trust and believe that we can count on mutual respect and the traditional bonds of friendship with these countries in our future relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking to the future and committed to dialogue and understanding, we in Serbia believe that peace is the highest value and the most solid foundation of development. We shall continue to invest our energies, knowledge and will in building a world more just, secure and worthy of the coming generations.

Thank you very much.