



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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STATEMENT

by

**H.E. MR. ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

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**Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Honorable Mr. President Lajcak, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on assuming this extremely important duty.

Honorable Excellency, Mr. Thomson, I would like to congratulate you on your successful presidency of the 71st session of the General Assembly. I avail myself of this opportunity to thank and to pay my tribute to the new Secretary General Mr. Antonio Guterres for his active engagement during the first year of his tenure, for a remarkably responsible duty of the Secretary General and for initiating reform process of great importance for the Organization.

It is my great honor to address you for the first time from this place in the capacity of the President of the Republic of Serbia.

We have carefully followed the world leaders in previous two days. It seems that we would not overemphasize if it would be said that almost everybody was speaking about the necessity of the reform of the UN, about peace and stability, often accusing someone else – a confronted party - acting as someone preventing mentioned peace and stability or as someone responsible for the difficult situation in the world. I would do my best to avoid that kind of approach.

Last year at this very place it was said that the situation worldwide was difficult. Today it is certainly more difficult than it was a year ago.

Today, I take opportunity to speak in front of you not for attacking those who cannot defend themselves here, but neither for attacking those who wouldn't have arguments to defend themselves from the truth. I'll speak about Serbia, its people, its reentering the world, a fact that world is accepting and embracing Serbia again, but that Serbia is trying to understand the world, even if it sometimes might not agree with great powers. Unlike some leaders, I have no need to patronize my people or to run election or non election campaign from this stage, because we have already won all our internal political battles. That's the reason why I'll speak about Serbia today, Serbia in the future as well as the future of the entire Western Balkans region I come from.

Why it is important to speak about the entire Balkans, especially its Western part. Because without broader and more serious insight into the problem we are facing, we will not be able to see let alone resolve our individual problems.

I would like to share with you a quotation by our famous writer Isidora Sekulic, who said the following:

"A peninsula is a separate world. Countries and nations in it, as if embarked on one boat, must have one common political problem and a political ideal, no matter how different they usually might be. The Balkan comes first, before all the countries in the Balkans, whenever the moment is difficult and dangerous, regardless of being dangerous politically or in terms of culture. (Will the Balkans for once open its sleepy eyes and see its paramount cultural capacity, if it plunges as a whole?)

Condition number one for the prosperous future of and for all us in that region is how to preserve peace and tranquility.

The Republic of Serbia invests a lot of efforts in stabilization of the situation in the region, which is our permanent commitment and politics. Just like we have been doing so far, we will continue to work devotedly and committedly on promotion of regional stability and cooperation; we believe that it is an investment in a better tomorrow for all of us. For today's success and progress in the future it is necessary, no matter how pathetic it might seem to someone, to preserve the peace and stability no matter what, which is a priority political task, with a daily hard work and learning as the most important social task and economic growth and reforms as a prerequisite for better life of, in the first place, poor ones and the middle class.

In previous period, we in Serbia have shown that with responsible politics of fiscal consolidation, even without huge privatization incomes, we could provide surplus in our budget; decrease unemployment rate from 26% to 12%; create flexible labor market by introducing modern laws, even when some much stronger countries of the developed West are having troubles with it. And more than anything, I am proud that we started to invest into creativity of our young people; that digitalization and artificial intelligence are becoming important topics in Serbia and not only in the most developed countries of the world. Of course, there are still so many things that we must deliver, and when you come from the Western Balkans the first question is whether we would be a part of some new conflicts, or we will have better and carefree future. In spite of numerous challenges, Serbia will keep investing efforts for creating conditions for new quality of relations within the region, based on mutual respect and commitment to common European future.

Today I would particularly like to refer to the political issues in the region and Belgrade's relations with Pristina. Having in mind the paramount importance of this issue for the Republic of Serbia, I will underline once again that reaching a political solution for the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is a national priority for Serbia. It's an issue that has a huge effect on our economy, but also on a clear future of the young people both in Serbia and in the entire region. You all know that we do not recognize the unilateral declaration of independence of the so called "Kosovo", but I will not speak about disrespect for our territorial integrity and sovereignty, instead I'll speak about our efforts to resolve the problem. To try to find a solution for a centuries long problem, related to which great powers were not helpful back in 1999 and 2008. I'll speak about our efforts to talk about future with Albanian leaders from Pristina.

Yesterday I heard Michael Bloomberg saying that it is better to spend thousands of hours talking than one minute fighting.

Everything that has been achieved so far through Brussels dialogue was a result of difficult compromises, with unambiguous concessions on both, but still mostly on our side. Significant progress reached throughout this process confirms constructiveness and commitment of the Republic of Serbia to the dialogue. We also demonstrated readiness for compromises that were not easy, contributing thus to finding mutually acceptable solutions for many complex issues. I want to emphasize that in the last 4 years, after we started with dialogue process in Brussels, although there were some fights and quarrels, physical attacks against the Serbs in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija nobody has been killed in ethnic confrontations. For us Serbs and for Albanians as well it is a great step forward, and therefore I am eager to continue in the future with such political efforts.

Additionally we invested paramount efforts in stabilization of overall circumstances in the Balkans. We often stayed silent for insults and attacks coming from some other countries, because we knew that peace and reconciliation are more important than gaining easy political points.

Precisely because of that, Serbs are more than eager to continue with successful economic reforms, as well as with the idea for creation of the Regional Economic Zone, which we do not intend to give up on. Former Yugoslavia was widely respected as a market, and for its success in attracting investors and international attention. Today, we are too small as individual markets to have better and more prosperous performance, and therefore I firmly believe that unique customs zone and taxation system is the future of the region. For example, a farmer producing milk only 10 km away from the border loses at least 7-8% of its profit, just for wasting 48 hour to cross in the territory of another country.

And that better and improved economy is the second biggest task for all our nations and for Serbia as well.

The third thing that is not less important than the first and the second one, and that is uniting these both big tasks are economic progress and our aspiration for EU membership. Path towards the membership to the EU, which is our most important trade and investment partner, is seen as a path towards greater stability, economic progress and strengthening democracy acquis. In previous years, EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkan countries acted as one of the most powerful instruments in political and economic transformation of the countries of the region into stable and modern societies. We believe that this policy, regardless of all the difficulties existing within the EU itself, as well as in the candidate countries and potential candidates, must continue in equally strong manner. We all want to be a part of the EU, but sometimes people in the Balkans and people in Serbia are treated in an unfairly different manner than those who had embarked that boat earlier.

We are not asking from the EU to speed up our accession process, but to treat us fairly and at least to some extent in the same manner like it had treated some of the already full Member States, that were admitted after 2003.

As you all know, Serbs are dignified people and we are expecting all other countries worldwide to respect us the way we respect them and their territorial integrity and sovereignty. We have never wanted nor will we want something that belongs to somebody else we only ask for equal respect for our country and its people.

I am proud that Serbia protects its freedom, independence and sovereignty and for acting as a country observing democratic principles. We will continue and never give up the politics of military neutrality, because we believe that such a politics is a politics of the peace and future. While we strive towards the EU and establish partnership relationship with the western countries, including and improving our relationship with the US, at the same time we keep cherishing the best possible relations with Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. And not only that we are not ashamed of those good relations, we are proud of them. But we'll always stand ready to observe developments in today's world by not judging superficially what's right or wrong, or what's just or unjust. We have never threatened anybody nor we will, but we will always dare to say and condemn if somebody, by launching only a single missile forces inhabitants of the Japanese island of Hokkaido to spend a day or a night in shelters. I would like to remind that courageous and wise American President Dwight D. Eisenhower was prudent enough to say that "every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed." Likewise, we will always show care and solidarity for Syrian, Afghan, Sub-Saharan or any other refugees. All the aforementioned will not diminish fierceness and sharpness in confronting international terrorism and radical Islamic movements like ISIS or Al Qaida, because we consider the democratic society of equal rights for all as the only possible society we want to live in and in which we see our future.

Honorable Excellencies,

We recognize fighting poverty and social inequality in the context of preventing the phenomenon of radicalism and strengthening extremism as a very important task. Integration of citizens of all religions and political and other affiliations into modern society based on common values, but with respect for right to identity and respecting everybody.

Distinguished Excellencies,

Serbia believes and expresses its satisfaction for the more and more important role of the UN not only in keeping peace and stability, but because of much more important tasks the Organization performs to the benefit of the mankind today. Each UN reform leading to the strengthening of its role will be supported by Serbia, because it means more discussions, rare use of force and less arrogance in international relations. And therefore our job is to do everything in order to enable more active role of the UN in processes worldwide.

Anyway, and I'll finish with it, the great Albert Einstein said: "The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it."

Thank you for your attention!