

**STATEMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA,
H.E. MR. EDI RAMA TO THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 72ND SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

How many times has it happened that humanity was confronted in a relatively short time with so many complex challenges as nowadays?

Has there ever been another period in what we call the modern times when we had to deal with so many pressing issues at the same time?

When was the last time that we remember when we were all confronted with such a conflicting prospect: that of an inspiring world that grows richer by the hour, driven by the tremendous progress of science and technology; and, on the other hand, that of a planet that seems to have lost its way, its energy and its vision and is erratically spiraling downwards?

There are no simple answers to complex questions. Yet, facts are stubborn and, in many respects reality looks grim.

Global terrorism and extreme radicalization continue to threaten our values and our way of life. They have become a persistent threat with the blind ability to strike everywhere, indiscriminately, with far reaching consequences as we have, sadly, witnessed so many times, including in the recent past.

Several brutal and seemingly intractable conflicts continue to devastate the lives of millions of people, threatening the future of entire generations. Armed conflicts are nowadays greater in complexity, the actors involved are numerous and the weapon and tactics used are more sophisticated. So are also the consequences, which continue to inflict endless human sufferings. 65 million people, the highest number since World War II that have been forcefully and brutally unrooted from their homes, constitute an indictment of our collective failure.

Climate change, a defiant truth that some still dare to question, is putting at risk our very own survival. It constitutes one the most fundamental challenges of our century, as it continues to cause increased humanitarian stress. Disasters are becoming more frequent and intense and, for one, the current hurricane season in the Atlantic reminds us that nature will always have the upper hand unless we become aware of the need to quickly adapt our way of life and protect our planet, our lives and that of our children.

The international global order has been seriously challenged without anything credible or promising to replace it. Worse, the situation in South Est Asia, a prolonged and recently

exacerbated crisis sparked by the policy of a stubborn totalitarian and paranoid regime, has brought back the dreadful fear of nuclear confrontation.

Inequality has continued to rise while, in contrast, the world becomes wealthier. This puts seriously in doubt the validity of promises and the guarantee of positive result to the benefit of all so many times advocated from this very place.

No country, however big, rich or powerful, can face or solve such problems alone. These challenges require a unified vision and a concerted reaction. In an increasingly globalized world, our vision and action need to be inclusive and universal, and bring people, communities and countries together.

And I, the leader of a small nation, hereby reiterate our pledge that we will faithfully do our part.

Mr. President,

The rise of violent extremism and non-state armed groups, perpetrating atrocities, particularly against ethnic and religious minorities, continues to be one of the most pressing challenges. The decisive action from the International Coalition has paid off. DAESH has lost almost 90% of the territory it once controlled and its ability to wage war has been severely diminished. Yet, let's make no mistake: its defeat on the ground doesn't mean it will disappear. Our response to extremism, radicalisation that leads to terrorism must continue and be adapted to the very nature of the persisting threat.

Albania was among the first countries to join the global coalition in the fight against ISIL/Da'esh and international terrorism. We are now implementing a 3 year Action-Plan as an instrument to implement the National Strategy on CVE. We welcome the increased attention given to the role of regional organizations in security issues. In this respect, we highly appreciate and welcome the close cooperation between the United Nations and the European Union, on the platform of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Mr. President,

All over the World, people want to be safe: free from violence, oppression, persecution and fear. They want to be treated with dignity, to know that their life matters, without distinction by gender, race, national or social origin, religious belief, political affiliation, property, birth or any other status. In order to achieve these goals, we need to go beyond declaratory undertakings. People rightly demand us to show responsibility and ability to act. The pledge to leave no one behind is the central theme of the 2030 Agenda on SDG-s.

Albania is fully committed to protect and promote all human rights, in particular, women rights, which is another major battle for change that my Government is leading. I am proud to announce that for the first time in the Albanian history half of the members of my government are women. They bring leadership skills, strength of character, commitment to our European values, and special devotion in serving the Albanian people. Furthermore, women count for around 30% of the members of the Parliament and 45% in the public administration. These may sound just mere statistics; instead they are the reflection of a platform to ensure that the role of women to development and change is recognized, their rightful place in the society is secured and their voice is heard.

It is my deep belief that empowerment of women serves as a powerful drive for overall economic development and national prosperity.

Mr. President,

One of the main national priorities for my country is to join the European Union. It is not just one objective in our foreign policy; it is not a contractual relation of sorts. For us, the European integration lies at the heart of our overall development since it touches every cell of our development architecture.

We are fully aware that it is first our own commitment and ability to make the necessary reforms that will determine the pace of the way ahead in the EU accession process. We are resolved to deliver on the fundamentals that consolidate the pillars of a democratic state, functioning economy and a government that works for its citizens. We want to measure our progress with results and the justice reform we are implementing is the best example.

We expect our EU partners to do their part in turn and clear the way towards opening accession talks. It will be a historic milestone in the process but also a strong encouragement for us to continue in the same path. We hope that in the EU, despite the current crisis, they continue to believe that the enlargement process remains the best European catalyzer for security, peace, development and prosperity. It has proved so in the past; it remains the right bet for the future.

A couple of months ago, at the general elections, citizens of Albania re-conducted me at the head of the government. They have agreed with our plans to prioritize consolidation of macroeconomic stability, employment growth, infrastructure development, energy, agriculture, agro-industry and tourism. Expectations are high and so is our resolve to meet them. Our target is to ensure economic growth of at least 5% each year through 2020.

Mr. President

This brings me to one of my favorite subjects: the development of regional cooperation and the transformation of the Western Balkans into an area of free movement of people, goods,

capitals and ideas, to the best benefit of everyone living there. It remains one of the main pillars of our foreign policy.

There have been times in the past when we used to come here and spend time and energies in competing with some of our neighbours on how to belittle each other, tell our one sided stories, and try to convince the world on our specific narratives. This is hopefully long gone. The best proof of the profound change in the Western Balkans lies in our joint efforts with a shared sense of responsibility and common purpose to make the region a natural part of Europe.

Together with the European Union and based on its principles and policies we are working to bring down every barrier to free trade by encouraging transnational economies. The implementation of the Regional Economic Area which we agreed to last July in Trieste, will boost trade and benefit our economies. I have not the slightest doubt that by acting this way, we will be best able to protect and promote everyone's national interests, respect the rights of minorities, strengthen good neighborly relations and move our countries and the region as a whole towards the EU.

A strong and healthy relation with the EU has proven key for the stability and reform progress in the Balkans. We have noticed that when EU is too busy with itself, this bond has shown to be fragile and insecure. This is why this important relationship needs to be fed and strengthened continuously as it also facilitates regional cooperation, increased understanding and work towards reconciliation in the best European tradition and record. As President Juncker stated in his address of the State of the EU just a few weeks ago: there is need for **a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans** in order to obtain more stability in the EU neighborhood. The revitalization of the Enlargement policy is the best deterrent to counter disintegration narrative fuelled by populist ideas. It is my firm belief that as much as Albania needs the EU, the EU needs a stronger, developed and coherent Western Balkans.

Mr. President

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We know it very well and practice has shown that in order to build a fully functioning region, all its members need to be treated the same way. This is why we think that the admission of Kosovo at every regional body with equal rights as other countries is of paramount significance.

Many have used this place over the last years to express worries and fear that Kosovo Independence would unleash dark forces no one would be able to control. We have seen nothing of that. Instead, what has really happened is that Kosovars, Albanians and Serbs, once threatened

with extermination by a brutal regime, are now free citizens living in democratic country and contributing to further developing an open society.

Who can rally deny Kosovo's impressive achievements made during less than a decade of its independence, in the consolidation of its democratic institutions, good governance, multiethnic and interreligious coexistence, including the evident progress in the Euro-Atlantic processes? Every credible report on the current situation in the Western Balkans would lead without any hesitation to the same conclusion: the Western Balkans today are far better off than 3, 5 or 10 years ago. Kosovo Independence unleashed unnecessary and artificial rhetoric but in reality has brought stability and cooperation.

Serbia and Kosovo are since several years now engaged into a serious dialogue toward normalization of their relations with the mediation and facilitation of the EU. It has increasingly produced a climate of trust for both countries and for regional co-operation.

This is even more a reason to remind those countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo to consider doing so. This should not be seen as a defiance or, even less, a loss as it is often wrongly portrayed.

We have said it before, we repeat it today: recognizing Kosovo, establishing relations and helping Kosovo move forward, something that 114 UN members have done so far, is a direct contribution to a better life for its citizens and an investment to the security and stability of the whole region, of all its countries, Serbia included.

Mr. President,

Let me end by highlighting the need for the UN to change in order to remain relevant, live up with its responsibilities, secure the promise of sustainable development, ensure human rights and guarantee peace and security for the future generations.

We are aware that this reform is about what we can and must do together to better support our common efforts in transforming our lives. The 2030 Agenda points the way towards a better future, the future we want and our children deserve. We cannot and must not fail in this promise.

Albania stands ready to do its part and cooperate with all those willing to invest in the future and make our world a better place for all.

Thank you.