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November 5

Statement of the Serbian president at the fourth round of Vienna talks

By Boris Tadic

Excellencies,

We very much appreciate the efforts you are making to facilitate these negotiations. The purpose of our presence is to help all of us move forward towards finding a compromise, negotiated solution to the future status of Kosovo and Metohija. We also hope that our presence and discussions will help the delegation from Pristina understand what are the opportunities for a constructive path to such a solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an important moment in these negotiations. We must be able to move to the next stage in a climate of confidence, wisdom and restraint. Public threats, artificial deadlines, and the manipulation of fears will not help to achieve a solution to the issue that we are negotiating. I note with satisfaction that in the last weeks we have seen a somewhat calmer tone in the international community, and I wish to acknowledge this. It is a reflection of the seriousness of the efforts of the Troika.

This encourages us because we never did, and do not wish, to participate in a dialogue of the deaf that simply results in entrenched and extreme positions. Truly, we are working our way towards an answer to three challenges with global implications:

One, how to satisfy certain communal aspirations. Two, how to preserve sovereign nationhood within the context of the international legal order. And three, how to contribute to regional and geo-strategic stability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Solving the future status of Kosovo cannot be taken out of its regional context. I want to be emphatically clear on this issue.

The region is passing through a delicate stage. It is moving away from its unhappy past and waiting in the antechamber of a new future. That future is the European Union.



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But today we remain suspended between the past and the future. In this state, there is the temptation to succumb to tactics and to forget the strategic options. And this could be very counter-productive both for the region and for the rest of the world.

Our discussion must be framed around a fundamental question: How do we accelerate the progress to Europe? For the European Union provides, through the principle of subsidiarity, the solution to the tension between the communal and the sovereign.

It is with this in mind that I believe that the residents of Kosovo enjoying the capacity to administer their domestic affairs, benefiting from access to prosperity under the well supervised rule of law is a good thing: good for the residents of Kosovo, good for the rest of Serbia, good for the entire region, and good for Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the process of consultations that have occurred in the last weeks, many ideas have been proposed. I think we have all looked for models through recent history that provide for a stable environment conducive to European integration. This is also implicit in some of the fourteen principal conclusions offered by the Troika in assessing our progress in the negotiations to date.

I would like to single out the model of Hong Kong. It provides elements that should be assessed carefully as offering answers to the challenges we are addressing.

First, a single constitutional framework is agreed within which different parts may govern themselves and cooperate under a common sovereign roof. As a natural parallel, there is no freedom to either party to take unilateral action regarding constitutional and sovereign matters.

Second, internationally-recognized borders are not altered. They remain unchanged and protected through cooperation with the international community.

Third: the development of any security forces is clearly restricted to a local capacity to ensure law and order.

These conditions are very much in line with our proposal about how to move ahead on the future status of Kosovo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the conclusions of the Troika on the status of negotiations. I want to refer specifically to those elements on which we need clarification and those on which we can build.



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Concerning the first conclusion, and in light of my earlier comments about the need for strategic priorities and regional stability, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 must remain paramount instrument in providing the legal framework for the continuation of our work. On this point, we must be crystal clear.

The second conclusion concerns the danger of unilateral action. All three sides, represented by the institutions of the Republic of Serbia, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo, and the international community mediators, must be obliged to abstain from any unilateral action. Good faith negotiations cannot take place in the presence of the threat of unilateralism.

Also, it should be clear, with regard to the fifth and sixth conclusions, that the nature of Kosovo governance and the presence of Serbian authorities in Kosovo will be in line with the future status agreement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With regard to the future path to the European Union, Serbia wishes to facilitate that future for all communities. Indeed, given the economic progress of Serbia, it is in the interest of all the citizens that a very close association be retained. It is up to the political leaders of Kosovo to seize this opportunity to benefit their citizens.

One of the preconditions is the degree to which they will do what they have not done so far: to promote and protect those Kosovo Serbs who remain in Kosovo, and to encourage the return of those who have been displaced.

The failure of Pristina to use the last eight years to provide for these improved conditions for the non-Albanian communities in Kosovo has rendered absurd their claims to any sovereign status.

As I have mentioned, it is in the interests of the entire region, and of Serbia, that Kosovo has the ability to autonomously participate in all international financial institutions. But I would extend this to the broader question of economy. We want a healthy Kosovo economy. We want prosperity achieved through transparency and the rule of law for Kosovo. As such, we are ready to consider any variety of proposals to achieve this objective.

I am sure that, under the right conditions, Serbian investors would welcome the opportunity to participate in the growth of the economy of Kosovo. With this in mind, I believe it is important to resolve through the relevant channels the outstanding issues of debt and privatization.



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Let me conclude this point by emphasizing that I have trouble imagining the future economic growth of Kosovo without the active cooperation of Serbia. It is a surprise to me that the Kosovo political leadership has not approached Belgrade before to discuss such issues that are vital to the economic development of Kosovo. We cannot afford to hold our citizens hostage to myopic politics.

Furthermore, we must also raise the question of protection of Serbian religious heritage in Kosovo. I am talking about living institutions that have profound spiritual and cultural relevance to all Serbs.

Our discussions must conclude with a clear guarantee of the special status that is reserved for the monastic communities. I have not been satisfied with the rather technical and unimaginative suggestions that have been put forward in the many months of preceding negotiation. Lastly, it goes without saying that we expect the international community to retain civilian and military presences in Kosovo after future status is determined and confirmed by the United Nations Security Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are poised at a delicate stage:

I believe that I have indicated clearly that there is room for further and urgent discussion. The economic realities dictate that common sense should prevail for the good of the residents of Kosovo. Regional realities dictate that our determination about the status of Kosovo should have as its fundamental goal the transition to a future in the European Union. Geo-political reality dictates that we seek compromises that consolidate peace very rapidly.

Thank you.