

The Role of Serbia and Montenegro in the Balkans

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Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak here today before this honourable audience. I have been working as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro only since last January, but I have, in fact, been closely following the Balkans and specifically what was once called Yugoslavia for quite some time now. I began my affair with the Balkans in Washington, in the capacity of Head of the Western Balkans Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome.

It is because of such previous experiences that I have gradually developed a strong Euro-Atlantic perspective when it comes to analysing and predicting the future of the region that today we continue to call the Balkans. I strongly believe that the future of Serbia and Montenegro and indeed the whole region lies in its full integration into the Euro-Atlantic family. I believe that the direction of such a process is no longer in discussion. Across the states and regions of former Yugoslavia, democratic governments share a common ambition to join the EU and NATO. In Serbia and Montenegro, the leadership and the society both overwhelmingly share such European vision. In this regard, Minister Svilanovic' s words at this seminar were particularly eloquent. Serbia and Montenegro's path towards Europe and full European integration has become more a matter of when and how. It is in everybody's interest to keep the perspective of such integration realistically visible, even though a lot of hard work remains to be done primarily by the Serbia and Montenegro government and societies. Integration must occur in a way that is conducive to better stability and prosperity not only for Serbia and Montenegro, but also for Europe as a whole. Let me quote late PM Djindjic, who very recently stated himself that "Europe does not want a country whose problems it would have to solve, it wants a stable family." In that sense, I would like to stress that while seeking integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutions, the Serbia and Montenegro government must not forget that it has a primary responsibility not only to its own people and societies, but also vis-à-vis the region and Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We cannot deny that this is a particularly difficult moment for Serbia and Montenegro. Exactly one week ago, the international community was convening here in Belgrade to attend the funeral of a reform-minded Prime Minister whose agenda was to bring the country closer to Europe. Since 12 March, Serbia is under a state of emergency. The assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic has added further to an already full political agenda, which included the functioning of the new state union of Serbia and Montenegro, the revitalisation of the economy, the adoption of a new Constitution and cooperation with the ICTY. A European Serbia and Montenegro means a healthy economy, good jobs and salaries, efficient health and education systems, respect for human rights and minority rights, security of the borders, and so on and so forth. There is no doubt that after October 5 2000 the country has made significant progress in most of these areas, though a lot remains to be done.

There is no doubt, however, that the tragic event of 12 March has brought to absolute prominence on the country's political agenda the fight against organised crime. While the time of inter-state

wars which tormented the region during the 90s seems to be over, organised crime, corruption and trafficking have emerged as a major threat to the consolidation of democracy in each of the Balkan countries, including Serbia and Montenegro, and in the region as a whole. Organised crime directly threatens the functioning of the state institutions, the rule of law, discourages foreign investments and economic business, fosters economic and social inequalities, societal divisiveness and offends human values. Organised crime is a regional problem and as such needs regional solutions. But it is primarily up to each country in the region to commit itself seriously to the fight against such problems. This is also true for Serbia and Montenegro. What is needed is a strong and unambiguous political will to fight against organised crime in all its different and complex articulations. It is also important that while sanctioning specific crimes, efforts are to be directed towards the consolidation of the legislation, the judiciary and all those state structures relevant to the fight against organised crime and to the consolidation of the rule of law. It is important that while fighting against organised crime, the "democratic acquis" which has been built after 5 October 2000 is not put into jeopardy.

As Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro, I want to reassure the government that we stand ready to redouble our help and assistance in the fight against organized crime and trafficking. Together with the experts of my Mission, we are finalizing a concrete strategy of assistance that we shall share with you shortly.

The fight against organised crime and the success of European-oriented reforms require active participation of the civil society. There is a need, I believe, for the government to use the country's positive energy for reform. A "pact for Europe" between the government and its citizens would be the best way to achieve such goals. Reform takes time. It cannot produce results over night. It is often painful but in time the gain significantly outweighs the pain, as the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe in the last decade has shown.

At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned the responsibilities that Serbia and Montenegro should also feel towards the whole Balkan region and Europe. There cannot be a stable and prosperous South-Eastern Europe unless Serbia and Montenegro is fully at peace both with itself and with its neighbours. Yesterday, one of the participants rightly pointed to the importance of Serbia and Montenegro's size and central geographical position in the Western Balkans. Nobody can disagree with such an objective reality. The region needs a democratic, self-confident and Europe-oriented Serbia and Montenegro. The 14 March 2002 Agreement and the recently approved Constitutional Charter offer a unique opportunity for both Belgrade and Podgorica to move together towards Europe and the European Union. It is our hope that such opportunity be seized. The OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro cannot but support this process. We stand ready to offer our assistance and expertise to guarantee the effective functioning of the new state union institutions, from the Parliament to the President and the five state union ministries. By working together in order to join the European Union, Serbia and Montenegro would also send a positive signal to the other countries in the region, from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Macedonia, namely that the road towards Europe is based on harmonisation and integration. It is after all on the basis of these two principles - harmonisation and integration - that the Europeans have managed to put behind them their past conflicts and transform the continent into an area of peace and stability.

As recalled by several previous speakers, Serbia and Montenegro has positively engaged in a process of reconciliation with its neighbours. The restoration of diplomatic relations with most of them and the conclusion of numerous bilateral agreements testify to this new positive attitude. There is a need to continue on such a positive track to help establish in the region a climate of trust and to wipe out the legacy of the past. Only on the basis of such trust can outstanding problems

such as the return or resettlement of thousands of refugees and displaced persons and the status of Kosovo be resolved. Of course, solution of these problems requires goodwill and flexibility from all parties involved.

It is also important that Serbia and Montenegro, together with its neighbours, continue to build on the positive experience of regional integration of the last few years. There is, on occasion, tendency to underestimate the importance and immense value of the numerous regional initiatives such as the Stability Pact, the Central European Initiative and the Southeast Europe Cooperation Process. Such attitudes are inappropriate. Regional cooperation and EU perspective are two complimentary processes. Economic growth and prosperity can better be achieved when the countries of the region can count on economies of scale by integrating the markets, energy systems and transport infrastructures, creating the conditions for free flow of persons, goods and capital. Regional co-operation does make sense per se no matter if and when EU accession takes place. And no positive and credible regional co-operation in the Balkans is imaginable without the full and active participation of Serbia and Montenegro.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia and Montenegro, as well as the other countries in the region, have to take ownership of their reforms. Stability of Serbia and Montenegro and the region also requires a continuous and patient engagement of the transatlantic community. The Western Balkans has been a success story of the post Cold War partnership between Europe and the United States. We need to continue to build on such partnership to fully integrate the region into our family and to finish our job, which remains the creation of a Europe whole and free.