



## **REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

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GENERAL DEBATE

73<sup>RD</sup> REGULAR SESSION

OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE UNITED NATIONS

*Check against delivery*

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

by

H.E. MS. ANA BRNABIĆ,

PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

New York, 26 September 2018

Madam President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to address you on behalf of the Republic of Serbia.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate H.E. Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, on the assumption of the Presidency of the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I assure you, Madam President, that **Serbia is deeply committed to advancing, in practice, the topics on this session's agenda: peaceful, equitable, and sustainable societies.**

Having said that, I must also say that it is indeed a pleasure to see a **fellow stateswoman** presiding over this important institution.

My congratulations are also due to H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčak for his stewardship of the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the General Assembly, as well as to H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, for his engagement and commitment to promoting important reform processes within the UN system.

Excellencies,

I will not say anything new or original if I say that the world of today – be it Europe, Americas, Asia, Africa, Australia – faces significant, and increasing, challenges: already grave consequences of climate change; migration; terrorism; the rise of populism; and greater divides between us, at a time when we need greater convergence.

We've all heard this throughout our discussions and from more than one leader during the UN General Assembly debate.

I will, however, say this: in looking for our way out of this and in striving to build a better world for all of us, we all need to start from ourselves and the things we must do by ourselves, first and foremost as individuals, then our countries, then our regions, then our continents and then the

united world that we are. We, once more, need to start bringing the nations of the world together, much like 70 or so years ago.

**Serbia is on the way of rethinking itself, as a prosperous, dynamic, creative, innovative, open society, within the united Europe, that is whole, free, and at peace.**

I am often asked – when others are leaving European Union, when so many are doubting the prospect of united Europe – why would joining the EU be your first and foremost strategic goal?

And, I have often asked myself the same thing. And, in life, when you are not sure of answers, you go back to basics. You clear your head of the daily clutter, forget political misconceptions and spins, and think of basic values. That's where you get your answers from.

The basic value of the European Union, much like the basic value of the United Nations, is: peace. It's not economy, or trade, or bigger market. It's peace. All of these other things, and much, much more, came, and will always come, as a spillover effect of peace.

**European Union was a peace project, and it is a successful one.**

And we want, we need, to be part of it – so there is sustainable peace, and consequently stability and prosperity, in the Balkans – this troubled region of the world that used to be known as the powder keg of Europe.

I am extremely proud of what Serbia has been able to achieve in the past four years. We've built macroeconomic stability and proved we are responsible and reliable partner. Our economic activity has intensified, unemployment has more than halved compared to only four years ago, and we are seeing speedy recovery. Today, Serbia is one of the countries with the highest economic growth in Europe, characterized by a substantial and ever greater influx of foreign investment.

We've embarked on a comprehensive public administration reform with one simple goal: for it to become citizen-focused. We are reminding, on a daily basis, our administration, all of us, that we are there to serve, and not to be served.

We are also working on strengthening the rule of law – through reforms of judiciary, working with media, establishing honest dialogue with civil society organizations, building institutions to fight organized crime and corruption, ensuring fairness and justice for all.

What we are doing is not easy and we are far from always being successful, but it is a path to which we are fully committed.

Talking about things which are not easy, but for which one needs to take responsibility in order to build peace and prosperity in one's region, one's continent, and one's world, I cannot emphasize enough how important regional cooperation and stability is for Serbia.

And, here, we are talking about the region which has never, ever, been stable, or very predictable, or part of the world known for peace, reason and pragmatism.

On the contrary. We've always been known for, and we've always been proud of, our excessive emotions, sacrifices, poetic struggles, traditional animosities.

Today, Serbia is trying very hard to leave this in the past and **grow** to become more reasonable, instead of more emotional; more pragmatic, instead of immersed in myths; proud of its victories and not of its losses; a country which is building unexpected friendships, in place of traditional animosities.

And I am proud to say that our President has been leading the way in this internal struggle of ours to grow and mature; to leave the past behind and turn towards a much different future.

First and foremost, I am addressing here the issue of our Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija which split down the middle even the UN – less than half of the UN member countries recognize the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo, while more than half, i.e. more than 5 billion people in the world, refuse to recognize the illegal secession of Kosovo.

What Serbia has been trying to do in the past year, is essentially trying to **close** Pandora's Box which was opened 10 years ago when unilateral declaration of independence was proclaimed by authorities in Priština, and the rush by a number of countries in the world to recognize that unilateral declaration of independence regardless of international law and standards; regardless of the fact that this was done only 4 years after Serbian churches and monasteries, world heritage sites, were looted and burned; and regardless of the fact that international community always stated "standards before status" as their mantra – and when everyone saw that standards are not on Priština's agenda, they decided to break their own mantra and decide on the status.

**Serbia of today is committed to peace and, if I may say so, behaving as an adult.**

We've signed the Brussels Agreement more than five years ago, and implemented it. Priština signed it, but still did not implement even one single word of it. We will continue insisting on the full implementation of the Brussels Agreement and establishment of the Community of Serbian Municipalities, but we will remain tolerant and patient.

I can tell you today: however difficult, and difficult it is, however challenging, and challenging it is; however sometimes hopeless and wasteful the dialogue with Priština might be, we will stay committed to finding a compromise which will ensure sustainable peace, prosperity and brighter future for all people in the region.

Serbia will continue demonstrating readiness to compromise, which is far from easy; but in that we need a counterpart which is politically bold, responsible, committed and trustworthy, and that has not been the case thus far.

I am therefore asking the international community to continue supporting the efforts that Serbia initiated. To achieve progress in the dialogue, we need undiluted and consistent support by the international community.

Your Excellencies,

Serbia is committed to working with other nations across the globe on taking our "common destiny", as many in the UN refer to it, into our own hands.

We want to claim accountability towards future generations. We want them to hold us accountable.

That is why we are investing so much in peace, understanding and reconciliation in the region. And, on the other hand, we are equally investing in our future.

The key priorities of my Government are youth and education. We need to start teaching our youth how to think, and not what to think.

**Not just Serbia, but all of us, need to start investing more than ever before in education which will create more innovative, braver, more free-thinking individuals who will then, in turn, create the world which is freer, fairer, and which is also, if I am to be honest, more fun.**

**The world which will value people for who they are and the values and beliefs they stand for, rather than where they are from, what color is their skin, or who they love.**

**Serbia is very fortunate because we have a lot of people, especially young people, who are amongst the best in the world in creative thinking, video gaming, genome research, digital agriculture, animation, physics, machine engineering, blockchain, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, maths, biology, software development and programming.**

**Our absolute key priority is to support them and to make sure we create a system, institutions, so that more of them can realize their full potential. Not only that this will be the basis for the future growth of Serbia, but perhaps more importantly, we hope to be able to empower them so that they will, together with others from all over, build a better world for all of us.**

**Without any doubt, our future is digital, and as General Secretary Guterres said at the opening of the general debate, “technology is on our side”.**

**Although small, I believe Serbia can and will play an important role in digital developments in the future which will help us deal with climate change, by far the biggest challenge ahead of us; alleviate hunger by increasing efficiency and making agriculture smarter; help with poverty reduction by ensuring easy access to finance even to the poorest, most disadvantaged ones, those which we cannot leave behind.**

**This is how Serbia sees its path to more peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies.**

**This is us, Serbia, doing our bit for the better world.**

**Thank you.**