



THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Security Council meeting
Security Council Resolutions
1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998),
1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Check against delivery

STATEMENT

by

H. E. VUK JEREMIC
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

New York, 14 February 2008

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

There was a time when the final authority of the United Nations Security Council was not fully respected, when its ultimate legitimacy was discounted, and when its capacity to act was restricted. That time was the Cold War, and that time has passed.

Today, we no longer view international politics as a winner-takes-all contest.

The Security Council—and the United Nations system as a whole—is once again the crucible of human hope for peace and security, the focal point of trust, and the center of our confidence in the concord to come.

Today, we embrace the global diversity of views. We believe it makes us stronger as a world community. And we judge that the world is a better place, full of the possibility that comes with the secure knowledge that our destiny is inexorably tied to one another's.

Mr. President,

Since the democratic overthrow of the regime of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, the citizens of our country have regained their freedom and started enjoying the benefits of peace. We have toiled unceasingly to provide a prosperous future for all, under the roof of a united Europe. And we have done so while working hard to advance reconciliation with our neighbors—a cornerstone of our policy to break with the legacy of the Balkans' recent past.

For the first time in history, the region is well within reach of the point of no return.

Our success to date has been a great victory for all who believe that belonging to Europe is good for Serbia, good for the Balkans, good for all the nations of the Old Continent.

And yet, Excellencies, we have been informed of a deliberate intention to drastically set back progressive development throughout the region. If allowed to stand, the adverse consequences for not only the Western Balkans, but the world community as a whole, will be grave.

The imminence and scope of this threat brings me before you this afternoon, as does the expectation that by working together, we can avert a disaster of unfathomable proportions.

Mr. President,

We have received reliable information that the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, under interim UN administration, intend to unilaterally and illegally declare independence from the Republic of Serbia in the coming days.

Such an illegitimate declaration by the authorities in Pristina would brutally violate Security Council Resolution 1244's reaffirmation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a member-state of the

United Nations, in this case, the Republic of Serbia, which includes—quite explicitly, according to the text of the resolution and our own Constitution—our province of Kosovo and Metohija.

Mr. President,

The Security Council, together with each and every member-state of the United Nations, has a Chapter VII obligation—a binding obligation—to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. This is the plain language of Resolution 1244, and we expect, Mr. President, the Security Council to honor the demands of international law, the requirements of international justice, the principles of the United Nations Charter, and the very language of this Council's Resolution, as you consider how to respond to the hostile intent of the authorities in Pristina.

Mr. President,

The Republic of Serbia shall not tolerate such an illegal act of secession. Our Government and National Assembly will declare this action of the authorities in Pristina null and void. And we shall undertake all diplomatic, political, and economic measures designed to impede and reverse this direct and unprovoked attack on our sovereignty.

I must add, Mr. President, that as a responsible member of the international community committed to the peaceful and negotiated resolution of disputes—and as a dedicated aspirant to membership in the European Union—the Republic of Serbia will not resort to the use of force. For violence cannot bring a peaceful settlement to any crisis. That is why even in this troubled hour, we repeat our call upon the authorities in Pristina to publicly and unambiguously commit to the process of seeking a compromise solution to the future status of our southern province.

Together, acting with forethought and prudence, Pristina and Belgrade, with the support of this Council, can still avoid setting a precedent that will do irreparable harm to the international system. The precise nature of this precedent must be spelled out.

The unilateral and illegal declaration of independence of Kosovo from Serbia by the authorities in Pristina would constitute nothing less than the forcible partition of a sovereign member-state of the United Nations. The direct and immediate consequence of this act would be the destruction of the first principle of the United Nations, namely the sovereign equality of all member-states.

Such a precedent, imposed on the world community, would echo far, far away, into every corner of our globe. For we would discover that the rushing river of self-determination has become an uncontrolled cascade of secession.

We all know that there are dozens of Kosovo-s throughout the world, just waiting for secession to be legitimized, to be rendered an acceptable norm. Many existing conflicts would escalate, frozen conflicts would reignite, and new ones would be instigated.

Mr. President,

Let me be very clear. The Republic of Serbia shall never accept any violation of its territorial integrity. We shall never recognize Kosovo's independence. We shall not waiver, we shall not yield, should this

cowardly act proceed unchecked. Not now. Not in a year. Not in a decade. Never. For Kosovo and Metohija shall remain a part of Serbia forever.

Make no mistake, Excellencies, the Kosovo Albanians are about to throw down the gauntlet to this Organization. They have committed themselves to a course of action that would constitute an unprecedented, express and deliberate violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the powers of the Security Council itself.

Mr. President,

This is what we believe is required.

First, that the Security Council take effective action to ensure that all provisions of the United Nations Charter and Resolution 1244 are fully respected. Therefore, the Security Council must urgently act to condemn the clear intent of the authorities in Pristina to unilaterally, illegally, and illegitimately declare independence from the Republic of Serbia. Additionally, the Security Council must reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, including Kosovo.

Second, that the Secretary-General and his Special Representative in Kosovo exercise their authority in this matter. Special Representative Joachim R cker must receive clear and unambiguous instructions to make swift use of his reserved powers, as enumerated in the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo, and, in the event of a declaration of independence by the province's Assembly, proclaim this act to be null and void. He must also be instructed to dissolve the Kosovo Assembly, on the grounds that declaring independence is not in conformity with Resolution 1244. He has this power. This power has been used before. He must make full use of it once more.

Third, that the international security presence in Kosovo, identified by the acronym KFOR, continue to abide by the legal framework for its operation, in conformity with paragraph 9 of Resolution 1244, and remain status-neutral. Continuing to adopt this approach ensures that all residents of our southern province will remain receptive to its mission to safeguard their lives and property.

KFOR must, Mr. President, demonstrate particular sensitivity toward the Kosovo Serb community, as well as to the clerics of the Serbian Orthodox Church and their monasteries, some of which have been placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage Sites, and alarmingly, on its List of World Heritage in Danger. These holy sites stand at the foundation of Serbian identity. They are not simply buildings or mere monuments. They constitute an essential link to the living tradition of Serbia today.

The Republic of Serbia is confident that KFOR has the capacity to prevent a repeat of the ethnic cleansing against the Serb population that took place in the latter half of 1999 and in March 2004, and to protect my nation's religious heritage against further destruction and cultural cleansing.

Fourth, Mr. President, that the European Union too continue to fully respect *all* the provisions of Resolution 1244—in particular those related to the authority vested in the Security Council (paragraphs 5 and 19).

Let there be no doubt: the Republic of Serbia welcomes as a matter of principle any demonstration of Europe's deepening commitment to the Western Balkans. And for that reason, we welcome the EU's desire to increase its presence in our southern province.

But in order for the EU-led mission to Kosovo to acquire the full international legitimacy so crucial to the fulfillment of its mission, it must first seek a mandate from the Security Council.

Mr. President,

We do not believe opportunities for negotiations are exhausted, because we believe it is never too late to work towards a solution that leads to regional peace and stability.

We do not believe it is ever too late to negotiate about the future—especially when it's a future we all share.

Is it too late to talk of peace in the Middle East, in Africa, or anywhere else in the world for that matter? Should we just give up—and in the process resign ourselves to the defeat of principles that form the core of what binds us together?

Walking away is not a legitimate option, for it means that we, as a world community relegate ourselves to the fatalism of the past. It means that we are ready and willing to sacrifice geo-strategic priorities on the altar of the communal aspirations of Kosovo Albanians. And it means that we would consciously avert our gaze from the main goal: a European future for all the Western Balkans.

Mr. President,

We have gathered today primarily to address the question of the status of Kosovo. But I am here to advise you clearly, and before history, of the status of the whole of Serbia as well.

I intend on setting the record straight, and I intend on being both blunt and undiplomatic.

My nation has suffered enough by being demonized for the 1990s. We are tired of seeing people hide behind the past to justify the abuse of our country today.

That is why we cannot allow a series of lies to be perpetuated into the history books that Serbia has been obstructionist, that Serbia never really negotiated, that Serbia is still a nationalistic country trying to oppress minorities. That Serbia is the cause of the present troubles.

Yes, Mr. President, I have heard these and many more such accusations. And I have heard them from people who should know better. Much better.

In back rooms and hallways, Excellencies, you have been told that every avenue has been exhausted. That a solution must be imposed, for negotiations have not born fruit.

What has transpired in the last two years has not been a real negotiation. It has been an exercise in which the end result was made known to all in advance.

The last two years is a record of failure of those who wanted to impose solutions with callous disregard for the most elementary precepts of international law and democratic values.

The record of the last two years is also an indictment of a process that ought to have brought peoples together, but instead forced them apart.

Excellencies, Serbia will not accept responsibility for this abject failure. History will judge those who substituted polemics for principles, and diplomatic theatre for visionary statesmanship.

Mr. President,

I appeal to all the members of the Security Council, as well as all the member-states of the United Nations, to continue to respect, in this time of crisis, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia.

We say to you, *with the certainty and fortitude of a unified nation*: Serbia will never forget.

The preservation of a Serbia whole and free, integrated into Europe and engaged with the world, is the basic tenet of our national interest. This will not change.

We have made our choice. Now is the time for the Security Council to choose, and for the member-states to choose—to choose whether to join us in a defense of the principles we all revere.

For that is the issue before you: whether to destroy or to preserve the sacrosanct character of basic solidarity between sovereign states, the common denominator of the world community.

A moment such as this defines paths of nations. We are a nation, Mr. President, that has struggled over the course of many centuries to defend its freedom, to establish its democracy, and to build its just society.

So it has been, so it is, and so it will be. And so will be Kosovo. Ours to the end. Kosovo will remain a part of Serbia forever.

Thank you, Mr. President, for having given me the opportunity to address this Council at a time of great consequence for us all.