



BORIS TADIC

President of the Republic of Serbia

I am glad to be sharing the stage with such a distinguished panel of leaders and commentators.

I come to you as the president of a country completely dedicated to pursuing policies that will propel it generationally forward. That is why the central strategic priority of the Republic of Serbia is rapid accession to the European Union. Serbia will join the EU, not only for reasons of geography, heritage, and economic prosperity, but also because of the values we hold in common—values that place the very idea of integration at the foundation of our politics. These values constitute the intangible excellence of 21st-century Europe, and they form the foundation of our democracy and society, our efforts at reconciliation, and our beliefs in what we can accomplish.

Of great significance is that Europe has become the unifying force of the region: My country's absolute dedication to join the EU is shared by all the countries of the Western Balkans. By choosing—as democracies—to belong to something that is greater than the sum of its parts, the Balkanization of the Balkans can be reversed. European Union membership is the region's only way to consolidate both integration and reconciliation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

How to achieve this is the prism through which I intend to say a few words about the overarching themes of this year's conference.

I believe we are being confronted with a new global geopolitical reality—and that it is evolving in ways few predicted even a short while ago. We use different terms: the neo-polar world, the era of overlapping systems, the age of relative powers. It all basically means the same thing: inter-dependence, unpredictability, and tectonic shifts; greater challenges combined with new opportunities. There are many reasons for all this, from climate change and financial markets turbulence, to terrorism and the easterly drift of the global balance of power. But I want to focus on one that is of singular importance for Serbia—and I think for all of us who are responsible stakeholders in the international system.

I refer to the preservation of the bedrock arrangements that continue to fundamentally define relations between states. These arrangements share a common source: the Charter of the United Nations. However much the world has changed since 1945, the United Nations remains the only universal, intergovernmental institution that unites us as a global community of sovereign states.

It remains indispensable: The UN is the only universally legitimate system to prevent the return to anarchy, to a zero-sum approach to relations between states—especially in a world that is becoming less coherent, and less predictable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recently, a dangerous challenge to the very nature of the international system enshrined at San Francisco in 1945 has been thrust upon us all. I speak of the unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija. Kosovo's UDI amounts to an attempt at partitioning a member State of the United Nations against its will, and contrary to international law, in order to appease a volatile and threatening ethnic minority. This is being attempted in the context of the emerging global tensions.

The fissures are multiplying: We all know that there are dozens of breakaway regions throughout the world, just waiting for secession to be legitimized, to be rendered an acceptable norm. Many existing conflicts could escalate, frozen conflicts could reignite, and new ones could be instigated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have heard the argument that Kosovo is *sui generis*—that it is a unique case.



But the truth is, this comes down to saying that Kosovo is an exception to the UN Charter and the rest of international law—that Kosovo should stand beyond the rules that govern the behavior of the international community. This is a dangerous claim to make. I believe no one should permit himself the right to declare such exceptions, especially in defiance of the Security Council's position—not in the Western Balkans, and nowhere else.

Let us think about other regions in the world: the Caucasus, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia. Why wouldn't another country, or an ad-hoc group of countries, declare yet another exception, another unique case that also needs to be exempt from international law? The only way to avoid this slippery slope to greater international anarchy is to re-acknowledge the supremacy—the ultimate legitimacy—of the United Nations and the international legal regime that has blossomed out of its visionary founding principles.

It gives me no pleasure to say that much of what Serbia predicted would take place should Kosovo unilaterally declare independence—in complete disregard of the firm opposition of the Security Council—has come to pass. But it is not too late to reverse course. Later today, we will see whether Serbia's diplomatic initiative to refer the question of the legality of Kosovo's UDI to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion will prevail.

If we succeed, the crisis to the international system caused by our southern province's attempt at secession could be prevented from serving as a deeply problematic precedent—in any part of the globe where secessionist ambitions are harbored. And if we succeed, a window of opportunity will have been opened regionally to begin to restore to health a number of relationships. The result could consolidate the incredible gains—political, economic, and moral—we have all made in recent times, by paving the way for Kosovo's challenge to be resolved in a non-confrontational, diplomatic manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the ICJ deliberates on the legality of Kosovo's UDI, Serbia intends to work with the region and other stakeholders to ensure the creation of much-needed political space to concentrate on what unites us instead of what drives us apart. We will remain a good-faith partner in the interim administration of our southern province.

Let me make a related point. It is well-known that the European Union has committed itself to building the much-needed institutional fabric of our southern province. Let there be no doubt: my country supports the deepening of Europe's engagement in any part of Serbia, including Kosovo.

In order for Europe's presence in Kosovo to be fully anchored within an acceptable, legitimate framework, it is vital that its mandate be approved by the Security Council; that it accepts status-neutrality; and that it abides by the overall authority of the United Nations as defined by resolution 1244.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We face a defining moment. Kosovo is a symptom of the larger malady we all feel. I believe it can be part of the solution. By working together to solve the UDI crisis, we can restore the trust and reaffirm the legitimacy of the UN Charter and the international legal regime that flows from it.

This is a time for strategic thinking and bold ideas. The future beckons, and finger-pointing will get us nowhere.

Thank you for your attention.