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Address to
the Seventeenth Ministerial Council Meeting of
the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić
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[AS DELIVERED]

Dear President Papoulias,
Mr. Chairman-in-Office,
Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by offering my sincere congratulations to the Hellenic Republic for launching a wide-ranging process of high-level dialogue on European security earlier this year in Corfu.

I also want to extend special thanks to our outgoing chairman-in-office, Foreign Minister Papandreou, for his hospitality and dynamic leadership at a critical moment for the OSCE.

In addition, I take this opportunity to wish all success to our colleague, Foreign Minister Saudabayev, as the Republic of Kazakhstan prepares to assume the chairmanship of our Organization.

Excellencies,

The OSCE—spanning an area from Vladivostok to Vancouver—represents a unique forum in which participating States can coordinate their positions in the context of the broader, common European security agenda.

Regrettably, the level of trust in the OSCE space is not as high as it once was. At present, our founding principles and common values are not always being consistently applied, raising the specter of double standards.

A flagrant example of this is the unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic-Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo. UDI constitutes a direct challenge to our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and took place in defiance of our democratic constitution, against the will of the Security Council, and in clear violation of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.

Excellencies,

Serbia responded to Kosovo's UDI in a way entirely consistent with the essence and spirit of Helsinki. At our initiative, an issue of such fundamental importance and complexity—passionately involving all at once identity, boundaries, communal rights, opposing historical narratives—was steered clear of resorting to the force of arms for the first time in the history of the Western Balkans.

To strengthen the rules of the OSCE space and tangibly contribute to regional stability, we chose to turn to the law.

Yesterday, the International Court of Justice—tasked by the UN General Assembly to examine whether UDI conforms to international law—began oral hearings in the Kosovo case.

Once the Court hands down its opinion, an opportunity to come together and reach a compromise will have been created—one that will be acceptable to all stakeholders, one that will consolidate peace and security in the Western Balkans, and one that will play a critical part in fulfilling our central strategic priority: membership in the European Union for the entire region. This chance must not be squandered, for there is no more important goal.

By embracing this peaceful, non-confrontational approach to UDI, Serbia in effect put forward a new model for ethnic conflict resolution in the 21st century. This is our contribution to the regional and global renewal of trust—essential, in our view, for the international system to meet the growing number of contemporary challenges.

Excellencies,

Recent events in the OSCE space have made it clear that it is time to engage in a frank dialogue about inclusive ways to bolster security in 21st century Europe, consistent with international law and our Organization's bedrock principle of decision-making by consensus.

The Corfu Process may well contribute to this strategic imperative. Under the incoming Kazakh chairmanship, we hope that the participating States will be able to achieve substantial progress within this Organization's framework. This would pave the way for a timely OSCE Heads of State Summit to take place in 2010, in Astana.

Only by working together—by restoring confidence and rebuilding trust—can we achieve what is needed: the revitalization of the spirit of Helsinki. All initiatives that may bring us closer to achieving that goal should be carefully examined in good faith. In this context, we commend the efforts of the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev.

Excellencies,

The Republic of Serbia is a co-sponsor of the Draft Ministerial Declaration on the Sixty-Fifth Anniversary of the End of the Second World War.

For the Serbian nation, our victory over fascism marked the conclusion of a brutal occupation that had forcefully partitioned our country, and brought profound misery to our people.

Across the entire European continent, this triumph over evil came at an exceedingly high price. A great number of valiant men and women lost their lives, entire cities were decimated, and whole regions were laid to waste.

In short, it took the unprecedented horrors of the Second World War for the international community to come together and draft the United Nations Charter, whose noble principles were later consolidated through the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act in what is now known as the OSCE space.

Despite the tensions caused by the Cold War, Europe remained entirely free of armed conflict for decades. Regretfully, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, parts of the OSCE space descended into inter-ethnic strife, while others were transformed into areas of instability. Nevertheless, Europe overall did not reverse course.

We believe the existing framework must adapt to the changing circumstances of this dynamic period in history.

We can only succeed by working together to create an unbreakable peace for the 21st century. This will necessitate finding ways to address existing misconceptions and legitimate concerns in a fair and inclusive way. But make no mistake, in order to obtain indivisible security for the benefit of future generations, we will have to start acting now.

Let us therefore turn to the strategic task at hand: the true consolidation of security and cooperation in Europe.

Thank you for your attention.