

THE SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO, MADAM ATIFETE JAHJAGA AT THE TRANSATLANTIC COUNCIL AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Honorable Mr. Serwer,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I received with pleasure the invitation to speak with you today and discuss the current state of affairs in Kosovo and the issues facing the region.

Mr. Daniel Serwer, who is well known and highly respect in my country, thank you such a welcome.

I would like to share with you the vision and my intentions for the development of Kosovo that I, as the President of Kosovo, harbor. Like any place that undergoes a period of transition, the present and the future are tied to the past and the approach toward the past is crucial for building the future.

Our history has seen the rise and fall of empires, the ebb and flow of armies and the injustice that comes with inequality and oppression.

For over a century, Kosovo's people have lived in occupation, repression and state violence. In Tito's Yugoslavia, Kosovo enjoyed broad autonomy, which was abolished by Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader in 1989.

During this time, Kosovo's Albanian majority – which make 90 percent of Kosovo's population - were thrown out of the state system – the parents lost their jobs, the students were thrown out of the schools and Albanian representatives were banned from the administration and Kosovo's institutions.

Over the years, Albanians created a parallel life. They created a voluntary tax system and set up homemade schools and hospitals as a form of civil disobedience (disobidijens), which is identified with our late leader Ibrahim Rugova, an intellectual that believed in reach the political goals through nonviolent means.

But in the late 1990s, the state repression escalated into an armed conflict. The Kosovo Liberation Army emerged, employing guerrilla tactics to draw the international attention to what was happening in Kosovo.

The Serb police and military launched a campaign of ethnic cleansing and forced out of Kosovo 60 percent of the population. One percent of the population was killed; women were raped and tens of thousands lost their homes, which were razed to the ground.

The idea was to empty out Kosovo of its native population, and colonize it with Serbs to change the ethnic structure.

Serbia's state-led repression came to an end after NATO's intervention in Kosovo. This is the first time that NATO, as a military alliance, took a joint action against a sovereign state – in this case Serbia - for humanitarian purposes.

As a result of this military humanitarian intervention, the displaced population was able to return to their homes and to begin building a normal life.

The Serbian forces were forced to leave Kosovo and an international United Nations administration was deployed in Kosovo. During this time we had tremendous international help and our recovery was quick and successful. After seven years international governance, conditions were created for Kosovo's people to express their will about the future of their country.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Kosovo was declared an independent and sovereign state in 2008, respecting international norms as the International Court of Justice confirmed in its ruling after considering Serbia's contestation of the legality of the declaration. Since then, Kosovo has been recognized as a state by 85 countries.

The United States and the main European countries recognized Kosovo's statehood within hours.

Kosovo has successfully joined several international organizations and it has developed bilateral relations with many countries. We continue to seek membership in all international organizations because we believe that this is the only way through which we can contribute to the global peace and stability.

In less than a generation Kosovo has been transformed from a place of war and privation to a new state on the road to integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Since the declaration of independence, Kosovo has established good neighborly relations with the countries of the region.

The Republic of Kosovo, a sovereign and independent country, has a clear European perspective. We see no other road.

This commitment has been demonstrated in all the processes conducted to this point, including the dialogue with the Republic of Serbia, which is taking place with the facilitation and the mediation of the European Union.

This dialogue began with the approval of the Resolution of the General Assembly of the UN, following the positive ruling of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's independence.

The dialogue with the Republic of Serbia represents the only way and the best way to normalize the relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia, as two independent and sovereign states.

Good neighborly relations is one of the key conditions for membership into the European Union and the support for the dialogue was based on the principle that the solutions that come out of it must be European solutions.

These solutions must be based on the best practices of the EU countries, without which we can neither begin nor conclude the process of membership into the European Union.

We should not avoid dialogue. The basic principles of our statehood and our wholeness should not and will not be part of any discussion with anyone, the least of all with the Republic of Serbia.

A dialogue that is transparent and accountable to our citizens will guarantee the success of this process, and secure their full support. Each agreement reached between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia must be strongly guaranteed by the European Union, and no agreement cannot and will not serve for the profit of one side only.

It is my hope that in the near future we will fully normalize our relations with Serbia because it is our strategic goal to join the European Union, where good neighborly relations and cooperation are key.

Dear Friends,

Today Kosovo is an independent, sovereign country, with a guaranteed territorial integrity and an equal member of the international community that contributes to its peace and stability.

Jointly we have laid the foundation to create a state of its citizens, a principle that remains unique in the Balkans.

However, in three municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo we are facing some difficulties. These municipalities are adjacent to Serbia and they are run by illegal structures that are supported by the Serbian state.

In this part of Kosovo lawlessness prevailed for a long time, allowing for contraband and organized crime to flourish. This has damaged the economy of both states, Kosovo and Serbia.

We are determined to normalize the situation in the municipalities in northern Kosovo, which we consider as a rule of law issue. I have made it clear that the implementation of Ahtisaari's Plan has no alternative and that plan cannot be modified.

The rights of the Serbian community, foreseen with the Plan and engrained in Kosovo's Constitution, are a strong guarantee for the future of the Serb community as an inseparable part of Kosovo's society.

I commend the start of the removal of barricades as an expression of citizens will to address their issues away from the street and in the institutions, by removing all the obstacles for the free movement of people and goods.

I fully understand that the Serb citizens in these municipalities want a calm life, in dignity, away from barricades and without fear for their future.

The integration of the Serb community in the three municipalities in the north of the country, is the way through which we build a common and secure future.

The Serb community in this part of the country should assume the responsibilities and the obligations to become part of the society, while considering Kosovo its homeland.

We have opened the door to integration and we will keep it open for everyone. Integration is based on the active participation in building an inclusive and democratic society, which respects the laws and the Constitution of the country.

The creation of the conditions to establish the rule of law, for economic development and democratization would normalize the situation in the three northern municipalities.

The establishment of the rule of law and security will be build in partnership with the international community and the Serb citizens, who must live in a safe environment, with access to justice through functional courts and law and order guaranteed by the Kosovo police.

A concrete plan for economic development for the municipalities in the north of Kosovo would include Southern Mitrovica, and this plan would be at the service of bringing citizens closer.

Kosovo's institutions, in upholding the Constitution, respecting the rights and the freedoms of Serb citizens in Leposavic, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Northern Mitrovica will organize, at a convenient time, free and democratic elections, to elect the legitimate and legal representatives of the citizens of these municipalities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As the President of the country I have also demanded the advancement of the relations between Kosovo and EU to the contractual level. This clarity of the European path for Kosovo is necessary and not solely in Kosovo's interest, but that of the region and the European Union itself.

Kosovo and the region cannot and should not be isolated. Each country has its own path to European Union, but it is of crucial importance that the countries do not confront each other but collaborate because this is a common goal we all seek to accomplish.

The paving of the way for Kosovo's membership into the EU, based on the respect of the EU principles, the policy of member states and our objective for integration, is a stimulus for the deepening of comprehensive reforms in the country.

We have another strategic goal. That is the deepening our permanent friendship with the United States of America, which has a long history starting with President Wilson's blueprint on the free will of the nations.

Kosovo is proud to count itself among the most US-friendly nations in the world and, as I said, it is a friendship stretches back for decades. It's one of shared values, but mostly it's about the care that the American leadership has shown toward the oppressed people in the world.

Honorable participants,

Kosovo is a success story. It is a closed chapter from which a lot of lessons can be drawn. There is no hegemony; there is no dictator that can keep innocent people oppressed because we are all part of a global community and there is no absolute sovereignty compared to collective and individual rights.

Some of the best practices we have developed jointly with the international community from its engagement in Kosovo are now used to bring people around the world freedom that they, just like us, were denied for a long time.

The international humanitarian intervention in Libya is the latest example, but there are countless examples of state-building lessons applied throughout the world as more states join the community of free nations.

At every step of our democratic development we have been designing a state that is true to our heritage, responsive to our people and in concert with European norms and values.

Finally, a word to all of our friends here in America.

As long as there is a Kosovo, we will always remember the spring of 1999, and how you were there in our hour of need.

You had nothing to gain and some things to lose by offering your support to a people struggling against persecution and injustice. And yet there you were.

Organizing the world's most powerful military alliance to support our quest for freedom. What you did for Kosovo represented the best about America and you should all be very proud.

Of course your support did not stop there. For the past twelve years thousands of the sons and daughters of America have come to Kosovo, to protect our borders, train our police, work with civil society and assist in the development of democratic governance.

Your support has given millions a chance to live in freedom and dignity.

My people and I will always be grateful to the United States of America for all they've done in the past decades for my country.

The engagement of the American administration revived the hopes for the building of a real democratic society based on equality, regardless of ethnicity, race or religious belonging.

It could not have been any different, because these are the ideals and principles upon which the American society is build.

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Kosovo and my people are now members of a free and dignified nation, equal with the rest of the free nations, providing regional peace and stability.

Today, the Western Balkans aspire Western values for they believe these are also the values that they have cherished forever and feel most close to. This is the will of our people.

Thank you!

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