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"ENABLING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

- VISION INSTEAD OF PREJUDICE"

= Keynote Speech =

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Let me begin by underlining how much I appreciate this kind opportunity to speak to you today.

Although the framing of my address asks that I begin by sharing with you my definition of the socio-political term we commonly identify as 'region', I'd like to share with you, if I may, a short quote by **Umberto Eco** which speaks, I believe, to the core of the 'regional' matter, namely that intolerance lies at the heart of conflict.

"Fundamentalism, integralism and pseudo-scientific racism are theoretical positions that presuppose a doctrine. Intolerance comes before any doctrine."

In fact this is one of those bitter life-lessons we learn through history, all across the globe, as well as right here in the Balkans. Yet again, each conversation about regions and regionalism is a lesson from geography. And, in our case, it is a lesson related to Southeastern Europe, in other words, a Balkan lesson.

Perhaps the most accurate definition, both geographically and politically, I've encountered comes from a study entitled "The Role of the Balkan Peninsula in the Mediterranean Region"¹, which gives the following insight:

"'The Balkans' is a fluid term as much as the terms 'Middle Europe' or 'Eastern Europe'. The first one was coined in the late 19th century to denote German-speaking states as the central part of Europe, while the second one is a relic from the Cold War era."

Nowadays, when almost all countries from the former Warsaw Pact have been integrated by the European Union and NATO, both terms read rather obsolete, at least in a geopolitical sense. In other words, today, 'Central Europe', geopolitically speaking, consists of Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, as well as Slovenia and Croatia (in their northern halves).

Indeed, some of you may be more comfortable or more familiar with the counterpart term – Southeast Europe, the broader of the two, in fact itself a 19th century creation. However, we should remember, as with the previously mentioned term – The Balkans, that there are no clear-cut and/or universally acknowledged or accepted historical or geographic divisions to delineate this region.

¹Dr Tonci Tadic and Igor Tabak, "The Role of the Balkan Peninsula in the Mediterranean Region" in *Mediterranean Foresight*. Geopolitical Round Table. Paris, 2010.

Thus, it seems only apt that I refer us to another term, a more recent addition – the transitional ‘Western Balkans’ coinage by the EU, set against the context of the EU’s accession strategy encompassing the former Yugoslav republics as well as Albania.

Indeed, the term will be rendered obsolete once all these countries join the EU. To an extent, it will share the same fate as the now historic term ‘Yugoslavia’: locked forever in the display cases of present and future museums dealing with Balkan history, which suggests that the term Southeast Europe would seem to have final say.

Yet, any attempt at shedding some light on the reality of the Balkans asks that we look closer at **Hans Morgenthau's** famous 1948 study on international relations, titled *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. In it, Morgenthau claims that “the world is the result of forces inherent in human nature”. And human nature again, as pointed out by the Ancient Greek philosopher **Thucydides**, is motivated by fear (phobos), self-interest (kerdos), and honor (doxa). (Along these lines, I highly recommend **Robert Kaplan's** *The Revenge of Geography*², a gripping study of international relations and world politics as seen by this prominent American thinker).

The organizers of the conference asked me with a good reason to avoid a historic approach in my contribution.

² Robert Kaplan, “*The Revenge of Geography*”. Random House. New York, 2012.

Even so, history aside (and for good reason, since historical repetition for the sake of historical repetition is a tiring practice), I do agree with **Mark Mazower's** statement:

*"[T]he problems and perspectives for Southeastern Europe are not those of the past, but dilemmas familiar in one form or another to most European countries: how to reconcile older patterns of welfare provision with the competitive pressures of global capitalism; how to provide affordable energy while safeguarding the natural environment from pollution; how to prevent the total decline of rural ways of life, and to build the prosperous economies that alone will reduce the attractions of organized crime and allow democracy to flourish."*³

These words paved the way to **my first conclusion**.

Referring to history I prefer not to repeat here and now Churchill's famous saying: *"[People in] the Balkans produce more history than they can consume."*

It has been over-quoted, so to speak. I've heard it so many times during the course of the last twenty years that it's almost rendered itself historically obsolete.

Instead, I feel that we are ready for an entirely different kind of an observation by Churchill.

Namely, at some point in his long and versatile career as a statesman, Sir Winston is credited for saying:

³Mark Mazower, *The Balkans*. Modern library edition. New York, 2001. P.155.

"Of this I am quite sure, that if we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find we have lost the future".⁴

How true, dear friends,
how true these words ring, now more than ever.
The statement seems to encapsulate our current Balkan circumstances.
And yet I say this as part of an unfaltering minority that is prepared to consider casting the Balkans in a positive rather than a negative light.

For only recently I came across a valuable ally in this regard, the Croatian author **Katarina Luketic**. In her most recent study, *The Balkans from Geography to Fantasy*⁵, she underlines the necessity of getting rid of any kind of stereotypes in the narrative on/about the Balkans, in order to help correct the distorting mirror imaging through which the local population sees itself, almost by default. Luketic reminds us that it's high time to start using a clear(er) mirror, i.e., one that I too am convinced fully corresponds to a more productive future.

In other words, *Anything is possible* – perhaps another saying more applicable for the Balkans at present.

Let's take for example the recent agreement between Serbia and Kosovo.
Words and phrases like "never", "no way", have been replaced by

⁴Dominique Enright, *The Wicked Wit of Winston Churchill*. M.O'Mara Books. London, 2011. P.158.

⁵Katarina Luketic, *"The Balkans from Geography to Fantasy"*. Algoritam. Zagreb-Mostar, 2013.

pragmatic solutions that could enable both Serbs and Kosovar Albanians to live next to each other and thus with each other. This agreement, in fact, could be used as a pattern for approaching and solving similar interethnic conflicts and tensions in the region.

Thus, I ask that we look at the following observation –

Forward looking people as the desired leaders of the Balkans!

Vision instead of prejudice!

Along those lines, I come to **my second conclusion**, namely that the key perception and observation about the Balkans, from a 21st century perspective should read:

For the first time in their thousands of years old history the peoples and nations in the Balkans have the opportunity to be their own architects, i.e., to do the designing of their own states, their bilateral relations, their intraregional relations as well as the integration of the region into the EU. It is by far, historically speaking, a uniquely unprecedented process.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the accompanying cultural and political shifts within Southeastern Europe, new historical perspectives opened up for the region. These new perspectives are based on internalizing the values of a market economy, human rights, minority rights and the rule of the democratic state. At the same time, it afforded the possibility for the former Eastern bloc states to join the process of European integration that has now entered its fourth decade. In other words, the possibility to become a member of the EU.

There is no doubt that in the last few decades the European Union has become a global player. If we merely look at the numbers involved: when the integration process started, the EU's population totaled around 170 million. Today, it estimates close to 500 million, which makes it the third largest area in the world (after China and India). The EU's GDP, with 16 trillion US dollars, is larger than that of the United States.

The real strength of Europe lies in its undeniable contribution to the history of civilization. At least eight out of the ten world famous philosophers and thinkers helm from the European continent. The same could be said for artists, painters, musicians, writers, all those who have shaped our global cultural heritage accepted across the globe. In other words, European 'software' is a key tool in measuring the balance of power on global scale in the 21st century.

The UN, as well as other international organizations, has recognized this leading role of the EU, in various areas including peace keeping, peace building and institutional building of crisis management, all across the globe. This fact is also relevant in the determination of the character of the transatlantic link between the US and the EU. The United States, with all its superior 'hardware', found at the core of its power, needs the EU as a partner on global scale because of said complementarity. And vice versa.

The process of building lasting institutions is required on both levels: the national and the regional. On the one hand, by strengthening the rule of law at the national level, the crucial moment in institutional building will be seized, and thus a basic prerequisite for full integration in the EU will be fulfilled. On the other hand, the regional cooperation in its institutional dimension should follow the Scandinavian example of the Nordic Council.

This approach was launched during the South-East Cooperation Process (SEEC) Summit in Skopje, in 2001. Only recently, in May 2013 in Ohrid, SEEC decided to establish a *Parliamentary Assembly*, an important step in the institutionalization of regional cooperation. Following the principle of the economy of scale, similar actions should be undertaken in the area of transport, energy and the environment.

Before looking into the security issues, I'd like to share with you an impressive assessment of the precondition of the region's security future by an outstanding American diplomat, George Kennan. His observations, found in the introduction of the Carnegie Endowment study⁶, were in this regards quite visionary. Namely, Kennan points out that:

- *firstly*, while the Balkan situation is one the US cannot be indifferent to, it is primarily a problem for the European Union.
- *secondly*, for the stability in the region (and Europe) two things are necessary: A) a new and clearly accepted territorial status quo, and

⁶George P. Kennan, *The other Balkan Wars*. Carnegie Endowment Books. Washington, 1993.

B) greater and more effective restraints on the behavior of the states in the region.

- *thirdly*, it will take outside mediation, and in all probability outside force, to design a reasonable settlement and bring the various parties to accept it and observe it.

We also need to take the following into account: the security situation in the region has tremendously improved as a result of NATO's presence. The majority of countries have become NATO members during the last decade, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia. As far as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia are concerned, it is a matter of time when they will join NATO, too. Serbia will most probably have a neutral status, similar to that of Finland and Austria.

The process of the Balkans' integration into the NATO security system, as well as subsequent EU membership for all the countries in the region, will certainly further reduce any possible frictions or tensions in the region.

NATO's presence and security umbrella guarantees a sustainable peace and security in the Balkans. For, it represents a new quality of international relations in the region, bilaterally and multilaterally. Ostensibly speaking, the future of the region is secure at the highest possible level by having NATO as a security shield vis-à-vis the neighboring regions and continents.

Bearing in mind the painful experiences from the past, riddled by frequent bilateral conflicts and wars at a large scale, NATO membership has to be regarded as prevention (a safety belt) against these kinds of threats to the peace and security in the Balkans.

Paddy Ashdown, the former EU High Representative in Bosnia, once said that “[P]resent Europe is unfinished business unless the Balkans are a part of it.”

In treating the region not as an isolated corner of Europe, but rather as the passageway to the world beyond the West, the European Union can only benefit from the Balkans.⁷

Consequently, the best way to foster and secure peace and stability is by boosting regional cooperation and economic development. The most efficient tool in this regard is the constitution and promotion of transport corridors and energy networks across the whole region.

Let me mention the Pan-European Corridors which represent a link between:

1. Central Europe with Scandinavia and the Mediterranean region;
2. Europe with Asia and the Middle East;
3. The Black Sea region with the Mediterranean region.

These are six Pan European Corridors with four branches that pass over the Balkans: Corridors IV, V, VII, VII IX and X. Road and regional

⁷Parag Khanna, *“The Second World”*. Random House. New York, 2008.

networks are developed along these Pan-European Corridors, supported by hefty funds.

Energy networks are also of key importance for the promotion of regional cooperation and economic development of the entire Balkans. In terms of concrete examples it is certainly worth to mention the formation of the Energy Community of the South-East Europe, a joint activity between the EU and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia. It is a framework for the integration of their electric energy systems into an European electric energy network.

As far as gas pipelines networks are concerned the EU is using this region in their policies on the security of energy supply and diversification of the energy sources. Natural gas from the Caspian Sea and the Middle East region should help to decrease the energy dependence on natural gas provided by the Russian Federation. The meaning of the major gas pipeline project is opening doors for the countries in the Balkans, casting them as strategic partners, thus allowing them to become an energy bridge between the countries outside of Europe (the natural gas producers) and the consumption countries of Europe.

My third conclusion, if you'd allow me, concerns the complete recovery and full integration of the Balkans into the EU. I'd like to argue that said recovery and integration will last as long as the ruling period of the communist regimes did in this part of Europe. In other words, around

half of a century. Some more math: almost 25 years have passed so far. Thus, 25 more years until this region reaches the stadium of economic and political development found at the core of the EU.

Consulting global economic indicators of the Balkans and the EU we can easily find out why is that so. Namely, the total population of the Balkans, with 63 million people, represents a bit more than 12% of the total population of the EU, while its total GDP represents only 4 % of the total EU GDP. As far as GDP per capita is concerned, the indicator for the region is 10.100,00 US\$, whereas the GDP per capita for the EU in average is approximately 34.000,00 US\$, which means that the level of GDP per capita in the Balkans represents only 33% of the average of the EU.

In order to accelerate the economic growth and the process of integration into the EU synergies must be created at the regional level. They include the institutional, infrastructural, environmental, transport and energy area of cooperation. Or to put it in visual terms instead: the more there are roads, tracks, tunnels and air connections, the less there would be prejudices, misconceptions and mistakes. This is the experience the already integrated part of the European continent offers us, something this region should certainly take note of.

* * *

Finally, if there is a **message** we can take from this gathering, I suggest the following –

Let the 21st century be the century of reconciliation, solidarity and progress for the Balkan peoples and nations. In such a new political environment, “the term Balkans might become synonymous with the wondrous natural beauty and fascinatingly rich human cultural diversity.”⁸ For this to be successfully implemented, we all have to embrace a different attitude when approaching the resolution of disputes and conflicts. Instead of the traditional, i.e., the anachronistic zero sum game, approach, people, especially leaders, should use the win-win approach. Thus, by mastering this fragile region filled with controversies, the people of the Balkans now have a unique opportunity to create on their own conditions for a bright and prosperous world for the generations to come.

Thank You.

⁸Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism*. Palgrave. New York 2002. P. 443.