

Honourable Guests,

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Dear Friends of Kosovo

Allow me to thank you for the invitation to speak here today.

I have had earlier points of contact with your Institute. Madame Secretary Albright and former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov are on your Board of Advisors. They both played a role in the modern history of Kosovo, each in their own way.

I met Secretary Albright and Minister Ivanov 18 years ago in a castle in France at Rambouillet.

I was only 29 years then, but I was the political leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army – the KLA; I was also leader of the Kosovo delegation in negotiations with the Serbian government seeking to bring peace to the Balkans.

Milosevic refused the proposed agreement that was supported by Europe, America and Russia and history changed.

The history of Kosovo changed.

The history of the Western Balkans changed.

Even books of political science in Europe changed because NATO had to start bombing Serbia.

This was the first time ever that a European country was bombed because it was committing ethnic cleansing and genocide.

My talk today is focused on how we can work together for a better future for Kosovo and for our neighbours and on how Kosovo is contributing to peace and stability in the European continent.

But I start with the past.

I start with Rambouillet and with those first steps by which we established Kosovo as an independent state.

I will not touch too much on history, but I want to give some context.

Kosovo was a part of federal Yugoslavia. Serbia cancelled the autonomy of Kosovo and started oppression of Kosovo Albanians. In response Kosovo first chose peaceful resistance.

Our then leader wanted to lead us as Ghandi had led his people.

But Serbia was not to Kosovo as England may have been to India; non-violent resistance did not bring peace or stability.

Milosevic went on to destroy first Croatia by force, then Bosnia, and it was soon Kosovo's turn.

First I led the student movement in Prishtina against one-party system.

Communism fell, but repression against my people increased. The fall of Communism was not enough for my country. We were not able to build democracy without freedom.

This is why I started, together with young students in Kosovo and few intellectuals, patriots, a movement of armed resistance.

I could have a good live in Vienna or Paris, where I had relatives, and I had visited few times.

I never liked war and confrontations. Indeed, I always hated wars. But active resistance remained the only option for freedom for my contry.

Our movement, soon to be called the Kosovo Liberation Army or KLA, was based on four principles:

ONE: We would not use terrorism as a method. So no bombs in Belgrade and no actions against civilians anywhere. Our goal was to remove Serbian Army and Police from Kosovo. KLA never, ever took actions outside the territory of Kosovo and never carried out any attacks on civilians.

TWO: Logistical and financial support would be accepted only on voluntary basis, from diaspora all around the world. And never from any kind of criminal activities.

And this is how it was done.

THREE: We would seek support and we would embrace Western values and Euro-Atlantic integration. Some of my friends were leftist Marxists in the beginning, some were rightist Nationalists; and some from civil society and the media in Prishtina, but we had consensus that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we must support the European and American alliances of nations. This also meant that we had to cooperate and to fight for a democratic system.

FOUR: Our struggle will not have any religious motives and colours. I can say proudly now that we were able to keep away any attempts of any religious ideology or religious fighters to penetrate KLA ranks. Never, under no circumstances, did any Islamic fundamentalist, was allowed to become member of KLA.

I am proud to say that during the whole war, in 1998 and 1999, not a single Serb Orthodox religious or cultural site was touched.

FIVE: We would ask for independent Kosovo as a compromise. Some Albanians wanted to unite all Albanians in one country. Serbia only wanted to have Kosovo inside Serbia without giving the right to our people to choose their own destiny. The compromise – a middle way - was to have an independent Kosovo. Neither joined with Albania nor with Serbia.

This was the best possible result for us and for all; this was soon the aim of political negotiations that I led in Rambouillet, in Paris in 1999 and in Vienna in 2006 and 2007 and in last 4 years in Brussels.

I mentioned these five points because I want to be clear that from the very first day of my activity in the political world –

First as a student leader, then as political leader of the KLA, then as opposition leader, then as Prime Minister, and now as a future President, I am and will be proud that we achieved our goals while respecting our principles.

I can quote Tim Judah, journalist from The Economist, who said that the KLA was the "the most successful guerrilla movement in modern history."

We managed to make Kosovo free with the help of NATO, with the help of Europe and America.

We managed to make Kosovo an independent country.

Now we have final aims: to join the EU and NATO in the future, and as soon as may be possible.

This reflects our third national consensus, after achieving our freedom and independence.

Independent Kosovo is now a part of the solution for peace in the Balkans as a whole.

We are not anymore importing security forces to bring stability.

We are exporting peace initiatives and dialogue as a contribution for long-term solutions and for European integration of Kosovo, Serbia and all countries in the Balkans.

After we declared independence in 2008, Serbia tried to block our international recognition by bringing proceedings at the International Court of Justice.

In the ICJ Serbia argued against Kosovo's Declaration of Independence.

We argued otherwise and won.

The ICJ decided that Kosovo was in the right and that our declaration of independence was not against international law.

Kosovo is now recognized by 111 UN states; we are members of the IMF and of the World Bank; we are also now an Olympic Nation and this summer Kosovo, for the first time in history, will participate in the Olympic Games in Rio with its flag.

This year we also entered into a historic agreement with the European Union. Kosovo has signed an SAA with the EU as a first formal agreement.

The UN General Assembly in 2010 recognized the ICJ opinion and instructed the EU to start a Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Baroness Ashton started first a technical dialogue and then a political dialogue.

It was not easy for Kosovo to talk to former enemies without their apologising for war crimes they had committed, without apology for ethnic cleansing.

It was not easy for Serbian leaders to meet me, founder of the KLA.

Just as it was not easy for Mandela and De Klerk to meet, or many other cases in history.

But they did it. They did it for a better future for their nation.

It was not easy for us, Kosovo and Serbia, but we had to work together because the people of Kosovo and the people of Serbia needed normalization.

I had an obligation to the people of Kosovo to work for a new EU perspective and for constructive compromises.

We met over 25 times and I spent more than 200 hours with Prime-Ministers Vucic and Dacic.

In the first meeting, with Dacic, we set 3 meters from each other. No handshake, we only looked across at each other. Only after a while, after getting our breath, we managed to shake hands.

First sentence from Dacic was: “For years, we sought to kill you”.

I responded: “We are not here to weep about the past, but to talk about the future.”

Soon, though, we managed to build a constructive dialogue.

We had to start from zero on many issues: to recognize University diplomas, to recognize ID cards, to recognize cadastre data.

In the end we signed the historic Brussels Agreement for Normalization, in April 2013.

We decided not to block each other in European Integration and to remove Serbian illegal parallel structures in Kosovo.

We agreed that in Kosovo there is only one law - Kosovo law - and only one Constitution – the Kosovo Constitution.

This was the first time ever that Kosovo and Serbia made an agreement in peacetime – the first time in history that we used dialogue not weapons.

After 100 years of animosity and confrontation.

It is an important agreement that is an example for other republics in the Western Balkans.

The Brussels Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia also helped improve relations between Albania and Serbia by creating a model for inclusive cooperation.

After 70 years, a Prime-Minister of Albania visited Belgrade, and a Serbian Prime-Minister returned the visit few month later.

I was invited to an event organised by Prime-Minister Rama for Prime-Minister Vucic.

Without the Brussels Agreement – they both concurred (KONKËRD) – there would not be normalisation between Albania and Serbia either.

The Brussels Agreement can be used now as a model for other open issues, such as the name-issue between Macedonia and Greece.

As Kosovo, we want to see Macedonia in NATO.

The Brussels Agreement also helped Chancellor Merkel to start the Berlin Process in which all Western Balkan countries agreed to be equal and to cooperate on infrastructure, about energy and other economic fields.

Is the Brussels Agreement the final agreement and final step to peace?

No. It is not.

Allow me to be clear.

There is more work to be done.

One century of conflict cannot be solved in one year of dialogue. Dialogue has to be permanent and we have to be brave.

In Kosovo, some political parties don't like the Brussels agreement and they are protesting in Parliament and in the streets against the dialogue with Belgrade.

There are opponents of the dialogue in Serbia, too, like Sheshel and some other nationalists. And the Government of Serbia sometimes doesn't respect the spirit of the agreement.

They started last year a very negative campaign against Kosovo's application for membership of UNESCO and they are still trying to prevent us from becoming members of other International Organizations.

But I am convinced this is short-term nationalism aimed (EJMD) at bringing short-term political benefits for Serbia and for Serbia alone.

We must focus on long-term cooperation and dialogue and the advantages to be generated for all states in our region:

I have now become President-Elect of Kosovo and I propose **four elements** of cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia to create a permanent framework for peace.

This framework is based on the gravitational power of Brussels.

Both Serbia and Kosovo want to be part of the EU and this provides tools with which we can forge peace and cooperation:

Point one: We must contribute sensibly and constructively to European concerns. The Balkans are not anymore in everyone else's focus. Close by, immigration is a problem; religious extremism is a problem.

There are problems in Paris, in Berlin, in The Hague.

So Kosovo and Serbia must cooperate to make a real contribution to European problems.

We must work to fight organized crime and human trafficking. We must work hard to defeat terrorist networks and ISIS in our own countries. We must also be careful of Russian involvement. Serbia still welcomes a Russian role; but I think - I AM SURE - Serbia will in future look to NATO and to the EU more than to Russia because it is surrounded by NATO and the EU.

In truth, there is no future for Serbia outside Euro-Atlantic cooperation and we must work together to help integration of our region.

This is why Kosovo must become part of INTERPOL. We must also, in future, join the Partnership for Peace program with NATO.

Point two: Kosovo and Serbia must make long-term deals that will help us focus on our economies and on jobs, not only on dialogue. Dialogue is not good if it takes too much time or brings too many emotions about the past. We must find solutions for the next 5 years and not only for 5 months. Serbia must accept Kosovo as a neighbour and must not resist Kosovo being integrated in the international community.

So we must make compromises that allow us to think - and look – into the future. Serbia must open chapters of negotiations with the EU. Kosovo must become an EU candidate.

Why meet 5 times a year for 10 hours of discussions when we can meet for 5 days in one session and find solutions that will serve us all for the next 5 or 10 years.

Somebody might say that dialogue must be used as a stick against Kosovo and Serbia.

I say that implementation of the agreements is the carrot and the stick for both countries.

Who implements the agreements, moves forward. Who doesn't, is left behind and pay the price.

Point three: We must work in a regional context and find solutions that include Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia. We must find solutions for bilateral problems. If Kosovo and Serbia agree, then Bosnia can work with Kosovo without problems from the leadership of the Republika Srpska. Montenegro membership in NATO is welcomed in Kosovo and it means more peace and stability in the region. This makes it safer for the region to move forward to join the Atlantic community.

I stand proud that I last summer I signed the Border Demarcation Agreement with Montenegro. President Obama rightly called it a historical agreement. Again, not everyone in Prishtina applauded me. But we are leaders, here to make difficult but right decisions.

So we must continue with the Berlin Process and have a successful conference in Paris this summer.

But the EU must work with us on concrete projects; talk is not enough. Nor are promises.

Kosovo cannot be kept isolated. We need visa liberalisation now. Yesterday, not tomorrow.

Concrete projects - in roads, in trains, in energy – are essential.

We must connect and integrate the region and prepare it for EU integration in the future.

Point four: We must continue to work on the rule of law and on bringing justice for victims. Kosovo has established a Special Chambers - A special Kosovo Court with Kosovo law but to be in the Hague. Many allegations were published in the – so-called – Dick Marty Report and now Kosovo is creating a very transparent and very international court process to establish the truth. We have nothing to hide.

The Special Court is an opportunity and an advantage for Kosovo, and not a punishment. I led the process of establishing this Court, in the Kosovo Government and in the Kosovo Parliament. Kosovo always had full cooperation with international justice. We cannot continue to ignore accusations simply because we must clear the name of the KLA of any doubts.

I don't like the fact that Kosovo is the only country to do this and I hope that Serbia will also be obliged to face genocide charges arising from what Serb politicians and military did in Kosovo.

We will work with international courts to show that victims are not forgotten. All victims must not be forgotten. But also all criminals who did crimes must not be forgotten. War Crimes are not our only worry.

It is an old issue but our new issue is how to deal with corruption and organized crime. Both of them exist in all Balkan countries and criminals and corrupt people cooperate in all Balkan countries.

So any future for the Balkans in the EU must be based on deep and on structural reforms designed to confirm and reinforce the rule of law.

I will be committed to these 4 points as President of Kosovo and I hope that you will help us achieve a lasting peace in Balkans.