We stand for a speeded up resolution

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It is my pleasure to be in Prishtina. For, thanks to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and the United States Institute of Peace I have been given the opportunity to meet Albanian colleagues and to discuss with them the topics that have been crying out for solution for a long time. For me, this opportunity is especially important since I have in mind the possibility of future cooperation. Though hardly perceivable today, our attempts on the road towards membership of the European Union are interlocked. This dialogue is even more significant since our relations are burdened with unresolved problems from the past. To solve them, we must discuss them. I thank the organizers for their strenuous efforts, and I thank all the participants for their goodwill in accepting the organizers’ invitation.

In my view, our goals are basically the same. We want a better life for our citizens both in Serbia and Kosovo. And to make it possible, we should adopt European, i.e. civilized values enabling the entire region to integrate into an unified Europe. Other options in the past have suffered historical defeats. The effects of those delusions were catastrophic for both peoples.

The biggest problem we are faced with is, certainly, the unresolved status of Kosovo. Serbia’s position concerning this problem mirrors its attitude towards modernization. We stand for a speeded up resolution that would open up European vistas to our citizens. Conservatives and forces of the former regime are using this unresolved problem to campaign against reformers and modernists, against European values and against civic ideas. Collective consciousness, fostered over six decades and combined with the poverty of the great majority of citizens, enables conservative forces to manipulate national feelings with a view to hindering substantial changes in society and the country’s modernization. Solutions to open national questions certainly do not suit them. Although we cannot change the past, we can squarely face up to it. But we can change people’s lives for the better, and that is the task we took upon ourselves when we launched into politics. These are initial steps towards shaping a new future. On the one hand, we have to face up to the past and violations of human rights, so as to do justice to all victims. On the other hand, we have to curb poverty, the strongest generator of extremism.

While referring to Serbia, I for practical reasons referred to the entire region. The majority of the Albanian elite may learn something from our experience. Serbs used to be the majority nation in ex-Yugoslavia. However, the Belgrade elite’s ideological extremism in the late 1980s, and, later on, the national extremism of the 1990s jeopardized all others. Along with others, Serbia itself has

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bourne the consequences and is still bearing them. In a manner that is the most painful both to us and the others, we are learning that the attitude towards minorities figures as a fundamental value of today’s civilization. Not only the realization of legitimate national and state goals, but also the quality of life of a majority community itself and all its citizens depend on the majority nation’s stance towards those who are in the minority. The majority cannot be free and happy, unless the minority also enjoy this state of affairs. We know this from experience. The Albanians make up the absolute majority in Kosovo. Therefore, the Albanians are fully responsible for the position of other peoples. Freedom and happiness to which the Albanians aspire are only attainable if other peoples coexisting in the region are also free and happy.

Serbs in Kosovo are currently unhappy, as they do not live a normal life. To begin with, they cannot make plans for the future. Those who have left for Serbia are also unhappy, as they are now far from their homesteads. Unlike many in Belgrade, who intimidate and confuse them, who inspire them with false hope and thus make them even unhappier, I would like to encourage them. Just recall the Serbs in Croatia. Most of them are in Serbia today, not of their own free will, but because of the policy that allegedly protected their homesteads and torched them instead, and sent those people to Belgrade in refugee columns. It is easy to manipulate those who are frightened, poor and confused. Therefore, no one who does not live with Kosovo Serbs should shape politics for them.

It is the citizens of Kosovo who are in the best position to be aware of their realistic and attainable interests. This is why they you should accept the fact that power can only be gained in elections and only through elections can one influence the form of government. And one can only do that through democratic institutions. The institutions enabling Kosovo Serbs to exercise their rights are located in Kosovo. That is how things have been since 1999. Living in a ghetto is the only alternative. I strongly believe there are many responsible and reasonable people among Kosovo Serbs who would not want a ghetto to determine their children’s future.

The politics of the 21st century are focused on people and citizens, rather than territories. These politics are concerned with people’s lives, happiness, prosperity and safety. Only in this way can a country’s and a society’s viable, desirable and indispensable development be secured. Serbia’s civic-political option deeply involves the belief that such politics of their own record meet the interests of all citizens and vouch for our children’s prosperous future. We are presently in the minority, but everyday life testifies to the validity of our political stance. If not today, those relying on the models that belong to the past will be certainly in the minority tomorrow — in Serbia and in Kosovo alike.

Today, the fact that the Albanian minority should accept that unconditional independence is a prerequisite for Kosovo’s European future. The resolution of Serbia’s statehood question is also a precondition for its modernization and European future as the European Union will only open its doors to sovereign states with unquestionable borders and certainly not engaged in territorial disputes.