

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Key note speech by President Ahtisaari to Kosovo
MFA Conference 'Chapter closed in the Balkans'**

11th September 2012

Madame President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday, five and a half years after I submitted to the United Nations Secretary-General a plan for the establishment of the structures of a functioning multi-ethnic democracy here in Kosovo, I had the great pleasure of celebrating the completion of that process.

The success of the process will not be proved in ceremonies alone, but in the protection of those institutions, in the sustained implementation of those policies, and in the upholding of those values included in the plan.

Nevertheless, the organisers of this conference are fully justified in describing the closing of a chapter in the Balkans. Kosovo was the first and the last of the challenges of the break-up of the old Yugoslavia. I hope we can describe that chapter as firmly closed. With the end of supervised independence, I hope that we can also close the chapter of Kosovo's existence as an incomplete state, a special case to be treated with special measures.

Today, it's my pleasure to join the celebration of the opening of a new chapter. This new chapter is one that builds on the successes of the old. The institutions and values that have begun to develop over the last four years must now be applied. Kosovo must start to act as the independent, sovereign state it has become - not only with the status and dignity of such a state, but with the

maturity and responsibility that statehood implies.

This is the chapter of Kosovo playing its proper, constructive role in the region; of Kosovo in a full relationship with the European Union and the rest of the world community.

I should first of all say that there are other people and other institutions better-placed to discuss Kosovo's future role. For Kosovo, the period of ad hoc interventions and special plans is over. Kosovo is now feeling the gravitational pull of the European Union. So if you wish to learn more of Kosovo's path for the coming years, you must talk to Mr Zbogar the European Union's Special Representative here, and to Miss Citaku Kosovo's Minister for European Integration.

Perhaps I should make one observation on Kosovo's European prospects, as someone who has observed the development of the Union over decades, and been involved in the stabilisation of transitional states like Kosovo.

Some have questioned whether the EU's internal challenges - the eurozone crisis, and doubts about further enlargement - combined with Kosovo's challenges in meeting all of the required standards for membership, make a European perspective so distant as to be invisible. I must say that these factors are, in the end, not relevant.

Kosovo and the European Union are inevitably parts of each other's future.

Not because of pressure or reluctant necessity, or as a merely political calculation. But because of the unchangeable reality of Kosovo's position, and the unchangeable reality of the nature and role of the European Union. Economically, culturally, socially,

politically and diplomatically, Kosovo is inescapably part of the European Union's strategic environment.

The EU must find a way to engage whole-heartedly with these two million people living next door. Some people persist in seeing Kosovo as a problem for the Union; I hope that many more see it as an opportunity. But either way, Kosovo is here, and the Union must make Kosovo part of its economic and political network. Not to do so would be to leave a permanent problem on the edge of the European vision.

There are of course substantial challenges for the EU in its relationship with Kosovo. They must be addressed, actively. By the Lisbon Treaty the EU defined for itself a new, more coherent and more dynamic role in international diplomacy - and many of us welcomed this development. If the Union is to succeed in this aspiration, it must seek the paths by which a common and forward-leaning policy is a desirable and real goal for all members. EU diplomacy must be a focusing of diverse talents and strengths, not a reduction to the lowest common denominator of policy acceptability. A Union that cannot overcome internal division in the creation of external policy, is no kind of Union.

Kosovo should be an EU success - and I trust it will be. A clearly European issue, as all stakeholders internally and internationally acknowledge. An issue which the EU needs to solve, and an issue which the EU has all the right tools to solve. As Kosovo continues to demonstrate through occasions like this today - and through the exceptional young Kosovar officials and politicians- it can be a committed and positive force. I hope that all EU members will come to find that Kosovo must be respected as a European partner, and as a state.

For Kosovo the position is the same. The European Union

is not a club which you may choose to join or not. The European Union is a powerful, positive and permanent part of the landscape of this region. Its networks of trade, of investment, of culture and of diplomacy are inherently part of the fabric. More powerfully than any other comparable entity in history, the EU has fostered a vision for a progressive future. Born itself out of division and bloodshed, the EU offers a possibility of unity and peace, and continues to export that vision.

Kosovo does not choose the EU, yes or no. Kosovo's choice is between on the one hand a passive, backward-looking failure to come to terms with its own relationship with the EU, and on the other hand a dynamic, forward-looking engagement with the Union - with all of the challenges and demands that that brings. Kosovo cannot change the fact that it has a relationship with the EU; but it can change the tone, and the meaning, and the strength of that relationship.

More immediately, and as a first page in this new chapter, Kosovo must continue to build a functioning relationship with its own diverse society, and with its neighbours.

If I may offer a personal perspective on this challenging but essential process: the idea of the Nobel peace prize - that list of men and women - gives the misleading impression of a series of problems that have been solved: a 'to do' list of world diplomacy, being ticked off year by year.

This is not so. Peace is not a tidy and final conclusion; peace is not a treaty, a signature or handshake. 'Peace' among the citizens of Kosovo, or between Kosovo and Serbia, will not be found in a single occasion.

This is what the new chapter means. Peace is a commitment to relate to each other in a different way.

Peace is a new tone of rhetoric, in Embassies but also in classrooms. It is the conviction, encouraged by leaders but responding to frustration among the people, that the past was destructive, and that a new and better way must be possible. Peace is Serb citizens here beginning to find ways to live and prosper within an independent Kosovo, it is the government and people of Kosovo recognising that such people are their fellow-citizens, and reaching out to them. Peace is not Kosovo and Serbia forgetting their past, but recognising that their future can and must be different.

This is a lesson for international diplomats as well. Real success is not found in the negotiating chamber or the signing of an agreement. It is found in the behaviour of people, ministers, officials, teachers, and neighbours alike. We must talk less of the final achievement of peace, and more of the attitudes and habits of peace.

This date, the 11th of September, has become notorious for a single act of intolerance between cultures, and it has become a shorthand for all the unrests that have followed. But I believe that the 11th of September also marked the beginning of a new attentiveness to the challenges of establishing relationships, and fostering greater understanding, between communities and cultures. Out of terror, came an awareness that civilisation must do better to be worthy of its name.

That is the thought I wish to leave you with, as we gather today to celebrate the important achievements made by the citizens of Kosovo in starting to revive the necessary co-operation, and as we look forward to the progress that will be made in the future.