



Coordination Center of Serbia & Montenegro
and the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija



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*Statement by Dr Nebojsa Covic
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before The Permanent Council of OSCE*

Vienna, 7 April 2005

Dear Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to greet You on behalf of the Council of Ministers of Serbia and Montenegro and on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and express my pleasure to have the opportunity to participate at today's session of the Standing Council of OSCE.

It has been quite some time since I last addressed this Council. The period that is behind us was characterized by numerous challenges in the region, especially in Kosovo and Metohia and, to a certain degree, in Southern Central Serbia.

I would like to remind You of our great joint success in resolving the crisis in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, in Southern Central Serbia in the spring and summer of 2001. This success was accompanied by comprehensive confidence building measures within which, with great support provided by OSCE, multi-ethnic police was established and municipal elections were organized based on a new model according to which power at local level in Bujanovac was for the first time won by political parties of ethnic Albanians. Significant investments played a key role in this process with the objective to improve the standard of living of all citizens living in these municipalities.

By its decision adopted on 28th December 2004 the Government of the Republic of Serbia confirmed its dedication to full implementation of the Program for political and security stabilization and economic-social development of municipalities Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, to be followed by decisive steps to make up for what has been lost during the previous year. The Coordination Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for municipalities Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa has been restructured, and representatives of all ethnic communities living in these municipalities actively take part in its activities, while the Mayors of these municipalities have become members of the Presidency of the Coordination Body with the status of vice-presidents. Eight Coordination

Groups have now been established: analysis and projects; state institutions and judiciary; economy, trade and development; education, sport and child care; culture and media; health, welfare and humanitarian relief; religious, historic and cultural heritage; and infrastructure and utilities. Representatives of local self-government and representatives of all communities living in these municipalities take part in the work of each of these Coordination Groups, which are chaired by the relevant deputy ministers. The Coordination Groups are presently producing their Action Plans in order to be as effective as possible. As before, the Coordination Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia will continue to provide full assistance and support to their activities.

The restructuring of the Coordination Body and implementing the idea of full participation of local communities in its work was a complex and timely process. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity and express our appreciation for the assistance and support provided in this process by the international community, especially the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro in Belgrade, headed by Ambassador Massari, making great efforts to ensure the maximum active participation of representatives of the Albanian ethnic community in the work of the Coordination Body.

In its approach to the sensitive process of ethnic reconciliation, Belgrade has maintained an unchanged position since the democratic government was established in October 2000. For more than five years we have been honestly attempting, in partnership with the international community, to contribute to building multi-ethnic society and confidence-building. Regarding the municipalities Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda, with the assistance and in partnership with the international community, we have achieved significant joint results. However, each attempt that we make to apply the same approach to Kosovo and Metohia is met with obstacles, and each initiative that we make is automatically rejected because it comes from Belgrade.

Despite the almost perfect image that is often portrayed by official reports coming from the Province, I cannot but once again on this occasion draw Your attention to the dramatically bad position of the Serb and other non-Albanian communities in Kosovo and

Metohia. I would remind You that elementary security and freedom of movement is still lacking for Serbs and other non-Albanians, that the continued abuse of their property and illegal privatization create conditions for continued ethnic cleansing of these communities, that there is no return of refugees and displaced persons and, except in declarative readiness of the provisional institutions and UNMIK, there are no efforts to revitalize returns. The Assembly and the Government of Kosovo and Metohia are not truly multi-ethnic and in the provisional institutions of self-government there is no protection of non-Albanian communities against majorisation. There is practically no confidence at all of Serbs and other non-Albanian ethnic communities in the political and administrative system in Kosovo and Metohia. They have no possibility to engage in the political processes because, as second-rank citizens, they are completely marginalized...

I believe that You will agree that these facts indicate beyond doubt that Kosovo and Metohia, even after six years of efforts by the international community to install standards of modern multi-ethnic and democratic community, is still far from achieving this aim. The excuse for such a situation should not be looked for neither in the Kosovo Serbs nor in Belgrade, as is often done recently, but in the general environment predominant in the Province where, despite the strong international civilian and military presence, throughout these six years, the new reality is that one ethnic community, the Serb one, is disappearing under the pressure and violent action of the majority community.

There have, however, recently been unduly optimistic assessments that, after six years of meager results, there will now, over only a few months ahead of us, be a major change and significant progress made, whereby conditions will be created to initiate the talks on the future status of the Province already this autumn. The policy of the international community which at one time was defined as the policy of „standards before status“ will be rephrased into a policy of „both standards and status“, because, even with all the optimism of the loudest proponents of the ”great success” achieved in Kosovo and Metohia, one cannot overlook the fact that achieving the standards of truly multi-ethnic society in the Province will require years, maybe decades.

Belgrade stands ready to give its full and constructive contribution to building multi-ethnic society in Kosovo and Metohia in accordance with European standards, in the spirit of mutual respect among all factors in this process. I believe that You are aware that almost ten weeks ago we have, with the Special Representative, initiated the issue of resuming dialogue between Belgrade and Priština, which was completely suspended after last year's massive and organized pogrom against Serbs by Albanian extremists. On the 16th March the Working Group for Missing and Kidnapped Persons resumed its work with the meeting in Belgrade and, already at the beginning of June a meeting is scheduled which will be held in Priština. We have taken all steps towards beginning the reconstruction of churches and monasteries damaged or destroyed in the last year's wave of violence, as well as steps needed to re-activate the other working Groups within the Vienna process – the working groups for return, energy and traffic – and include also a working group for decentralization and the High Advisory Group for Security. Our representatives in all the mentioned working groups have already been appointed and we are completely ready to immediately, fully and constructively be engaged in this process.

The coming months will bring dynamic activity in resolving the problems in Kosovo and Metohia. As announced, the first evaluation of the progress made in achieving the standards will be made at the beginning of summer and, depending on the outcome of this evaluation, talks on the future status of the Province could commence around the end of this year. Belgrade is ready in anticipation of these announced processes. You will, however, agree that if we wish to achieve a sustainable solution, it is necessary that the evaluation of success in achieving standards should be an evaluation of achievement and not of declarative intention that standards be achieved. If the evaluation refers to intentions and not to achievements, and if this is the basis for a decision on the future status of the Province, it will be a conscious bad compromise regarding the building of truly multi-ethnic democratic society in Kosovo and Metohia. I do hope that this is not the aspired goal.

Thank You for Your attention.