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**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MIROSLAVA BEHAM,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA,
IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDRESS OF
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
H.E. DR. FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER
AT THE 646th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 January 2007

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Serbia, I take great pleasure in warmly welcoming H.E. Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, in the Permanent Council on the occasion of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). We thank him also for his committed and wary words, which prove that it is not so wrong to hope or be convinced that important, positive incentives and strategic perspectives regarding the future of Europe will emerge from the German Presidency of the EU Council.

Europe is a success story, as Foreign Minister Steinmeier recently put it in a newspaper article - today he described it as a model of success -, a success story which brought about peace, freedom, democracy, prosperity, and the overcoming of the division of the continent. We would like to agree with this assessment vigorously and wish to stress that the OSCE, as the Conference for Security and Co-operation, made a substantial contribution to the unification of Europe precisely by eliminating existing divisions.

We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that this success story is not something to be taken for granted. If we look back at the more than six decades that have elapsed since the end of the Second World War, we can measure, how many obstacles had to be overcome in order to implement this project and how much labour, efforts, sweat, goodwill and above all – how many visions were and had to be invested in this project. It was the visionary power of individuals, but also the power which is inherent in visions as such, which have spurred on the unification of Europe. These powers must not abate, they have to be constantly renewed in a perpetually changing world in order not to lose their drive. There is no alternative to the European unification.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me here to clear a possible misunderstanding: When I speak of Europe, then I *mean* Europe. There is a language use which is imprecise and thus creates wrong conceptions, not to say prejudices. This is the case with phrases such as “the Balkans on the path to Europe” or “the European perspective of the Western Balkans”, formulations which imply that Europe and the Balkans are two different things. The Balkans *are* Europe – geographically, politically, culturally and historically, even though some of the Balkan States are not – yet – members of the European Union. To make this circumstance also linguistically clear would help much to overcome existing stereotypes and thereby break down barriers and eliminate exclusions. The conception of the Balkans as an area distinct from Europe belongs to the patterns of thought and perception prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and should be banished — sent back to where it belongs. Similar stereotyped ideas can, by the way, today be perceived also in relation to Russia or other States located at the so-called margins of Europe.

So, the Balkan States are Europe and some of them are still on their path to the European Union. The degrees of the progress of their political and social reform processes differ, but their orientation is clear — they see their future in the European Union. Given the challenges Europe and international policy in general face, we must consistently be aware of the fact that with many of the pending tasks we can only cope jointly: globalization, the fight against terrorism and organized crime, as well as environmental and climate protection, to mention only some of the challenges. For Serbia this means: close co-operation and partnership with the countries of the region and integration in the structures of the European Union. For our country this means also the prospect of progress and economic growth, as well as stability, security and the restoration of faith in the future, which many people in Serbia have lost and therefore sometimes rather look backwards than ahead.

In this respect we are encouraged by the signals of the German EU Presidency, which reveal that in Berlin and Brussels understanding is growing for the complex situation in which Serbia finds herself, and that the immense progress, which Serbia has made in the course of the past six years under the most difficult circumstances, is at last being appreciated.

Mr. Chairman,

A little while ago I spoke of the visionary power which was the drive for the unification of Europe. I wished the European Union, and Europe as a whole, would find the energy needed to develop a vision for the solution of the Kosovo issue, as well. Kosovo is not a problem which is happening on a different planet, but, I may say: in the middle of Europe. It would, for a thousand reasons, rip into the heart of Europe, if it failed in this matter. The principle on which Europe, but also the OSCE are based, has also to apply for Kosovo: namely, to reach lasting peace and sustainable

stability by overcoming antagonisms and divisions, by building confidence and reaching agreed solutions.

Mr. Chairman,

It is frequently said that the positions of the Serbs and Albanians in respect to the status question are so far apart that there is no point in pursuing any further negotiations. Allow me to recall, that in the framework of the Kosovo negotiations a single one-day meeting on the status issue was held in Vienna, namely on 24 July last year, were the parties only had time to bring forward their positions. Thus we can say that there have never been any genuine negotiations on the status of Kosovo. It is not only in the interests of Serbs and Albanians and of the region as a whole, but also and above all in the interest of Europe to invest the time and energy needed to make this chapter a part of the European success story, as well.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely wish Foreign Minister Steinmeier the best for the challenges of the Presidency, and not only for them. And, of course, we also wish him a Happy New Year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.