



**ADDRESS
BY H. E. MR. TOMISLAV NIKOLIC,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA,
TO THE AMBASSADORS ACCREDITED IN BELGRADE,
FOLLOWING ALBANIA'S PROPOSAL CONCERNING THE ADMISSION OF
THE SO-CALLED "REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO" TO UNESCO**

Palace of Serbia, Yugoslavia Hall

Belgrade, 16 October 2015

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have invited you here today to directly inform you about the grave issue facing Serbia, our region as a whole, Europe and the rest of the world.

I am referring to the proposal concerning the admission of the so-called "Republic of Kosovo" to UNESCO.

Some of you might think that I exaggerate when I say that this problem affects countries from all continents. In my statement, I shall attempt to conjure up the complexity and the gravity of this issue, that has, over the past few weeks, heightened our concerns as to whether the true path leading to the stabilization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina will ever be found, and whether they will be laid on future-proof foundations, fruitful to both parties equally, or almost equally.

You all know very well that the only true agreement between two conflicting parties is the one that both negotiating sides accept genuinely, wholeheartedly, with rational explanations, and no indignation. Every imposed agreement, or the one tailored to breed permanent discontent of any side is virtually not an agreement, but a hotbed of future conflict. Whenever that may be.

Moreover, you are all well familiar with the fact that the fundamental schism between Belgrade and Pristina took place due to a unilateral decision of the Pristina authorities to declare a new Albanian state in the Serbian territory. Therefore, everything we are faced with today has been spawned by plain secession.

We are aware that not all countries interpret the aforesaid in this way, for it is not their territory that is compromised; nevertheless, I believe that it is abundantly clear to everyone that this interpretation is the right one.

Everyone can recall that, prior to this unilateral secession, the Security Council of the United Nations adopted Resolution 1244 (1999), recognizing and stressing the sovereignty of Serbia over Kosovo and Metohija. Everything that later ensued was politically considered on the basis of this incontrovertible premise. I hereby refer to those states that fully respected the international law, the UN Charter, and consequently the decisions of the Security Council, the principal executive organ of the United Nations, responsible for international peace and security.

Nowadays as well, the major portion of mankind still adheres to these fundamental provisions and does not wish to encourage separatist movements and unilateral declaration of states in the territories of UN Member States.

With the wish to make a great effort towards peace, Serbia decided, in 2012, to embark upon EU-facilitated negotiations and harmonization, all with the aim of securing a normal and higher-quality life for all the inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija. Brussels was chosen as the capital where ALL ISSUES, I repeat all issues concerning the relations between Belgrade and Pristina will be placed on the table and discussed in good faith.

However, what is going on today? Following the Brussels Agreement from April 2013 and others that ensued, Serbia has implemented the undertaken obligations and has spared no effort to implement them fully. The issues that first featured at the negotiating table were the formation of the Community of Serbian Municipalities and the regulation of property issues in general, while the restitution of the property located in Kosovo and Metohija that has belonged, from time immemorial, to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which can be authenticated by Benefactors' Charters and valid legal property documents from the Middle Ages, was meant to be looked at separately.

The Serbian side has, since the launch of these negotiations, pointed to the fact that they cannot be successfully completed without the final agreement concerning the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the adequate protection of all its churches and accompanying objects. It has been said on innumerable occasions that the cultural heritage of the Serbian people, built for over a millennium in Kosovo and Metohija, must not be repossessed from those who claim it by laws of nature and the applicable international law.

Serbia is the only country in Europe which, in addition to the seizure of a part of its territory, expulsion of its people, their unpunished killing and the so-called harvesting of their organs, has now attempts made against its cultural heritage under the protection of UNESCO.

This heritage is intertwined with the living history and the centuries-long presence of the Serbian people in this territory. Hence, the attacks on the Serbian heritage that have been perpetrated since 1999, witnessed by all of us, are the attacks against the Serbs' identity and have a direct influence on their perception of safety and acceptance in a local community. All this is a part of the process of rewriting historical facts aimed at marginalizing and eliminating the Serbs and Serbia from the history of Kosovo and Metohija. At the same time, this reveals the essence of "Kosovo's" aspirations vis-à-vis UNESCO membership, though its promoters are trying to display it differently.

In evidence is a huge gulf between declarative advocacy and concrete actions taken by Pristina as regards the protection of the Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, a fact best underpinned by practical examples. From June 1999, that saw the cessation of armed

conflicts, until now, 236 churches, monasteries and other buildings owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church, including the cultural and historical monuments, were subject to attack. Out of the said number, as many as 61 have the status of cultural monuments, and 18 are of extreme importance for the Republic of Serbia- Church of the Virgin Hodegetria (1315), Church of St. Nicholas (1331), Church of the Holy Saviour (1348), the Hermitage and Monastery of Saint Peter Koriški (early 13th century) - to mention but a few.

In the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, 174 religious objects and 33 cultural and historic monuments were destroyed, more than 10 000 icons, ecclesiastic, artistic and officiation objects were stolen. 5261 headstones were either destroyed or damaged in 256 Serbian Orthodox graveyards, and not a single headstone can now be found at more than 50 Orthodox graveyards.

South of the Ibar River, not a single monument from the Serbian history has survived. Monuments honouring Milos Obilic, Lazar of Serbia, Vuk Karadzic, Dositej Obradovic, Petar Petrovic Njegos and many other great men who marked the Serbian history and culture, were destroyed. The extent of the destruction of anything that recalled in any way the centuries of the Serbian presence in Kosovo and Metohija is illustrated with the fact that the pine that used to stand in the village of Nerodimlje near Urosevac, believed to have been planted in 1336 by the medieval Emperor Dusan himself, was cut down. No town south of the Ibar River has a street that bears the name of a Serbian historical figure.

Your Excellencies,

Let me first recall the most significant international documents that constitute the legal basis calling upon the Republic of Serbia alone to protect, rehabilitate and preserve its cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija:

- Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), also known as the Hague Convention,
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), Annex 2, Point 6, which reaffirms that the armed forces and expert teams will be (I quote) “maintaining a presence at Serb patrimonial sites” (end of quote),
- UNMIK - FRY Common Document reaffirming (I quote) “the will to apply the relevant provisions of the Hague Convention” (end of quote).
- Practical application of the protection and preservation of cultural goods implemented on the basis of the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985), Serbia being its signatory since 2001, and finally
- Law on the protection of cultural monuments passed in reference to Kosovo and Metohija in 1977, valid since it respects UNMIK’s Regulation No. 1999/24, which establishes that “the law applicable in Kosovo shall be the law in force in Kosovo on 22 March 1989”.

I do not even want to mention the inalienable right to land and property ownership as a legal basis. The registered Serbian cultural goods are, in almost 80% of cases, owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Republic of Serbia.

Finally, every state and individual finds the Vancouver Declaration (1976) to be the most articulate document when it comes to defending the right of every country to (I quote) “have the right to be a sovereign inheritor of its own cultural values created throughout its history.” (end of quote) This is the right of every country, for its past, present and future can be

identified with its cultural heritage. There are neither grounds nor reasons to transfer this right to any other country, ethnic group, to any other people.

Now allow me to acquaint you with the timeline of the endeavours to preserve the Serbian medieval heritage, since the arrival of the international forces in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, to the March pogrom in 2004, which is a story in itself.

The first UNESCO mission came to Kosovo and Metohija on 22nd July 1999, shortly after the bombing of FR Yugoslavia. It was on this occasion that Mr. Colin Kaiser requested in his report that solely the Islamic buildings and the Ottoman heritage be protected, regardless of the fact that out of all the protected cultural monuments, 3 Ottoman, 2 Albanian and 57 Serbian monuments were destroyed. The second UNESCO mission that visited Kosovo and Metohija between 1 and 30 November 1999, led by Ross Borat, failed again to mention in its report the destroyed Serbian monasteries and solely suggested measures concerning 5 monuments of the Ottoman origin that UNESCO should take care of. The leader of the third mission in Kosovo and Metohija Professor Carlo Blasi, whose mission consisted of the Head of mission Mustafa Turman Osman and Co-Heads Ms. Edi Shukriu and Mr. Gonzalo Ratman (no Serbian experts were included), submitted the selfsame report. For the sake of truth and justice, I have to say not a single one out of the three reports was formally adopted in UNESCO organs, but they reached the international public, thus creating an impression that solely and exclusively monuments not belonging to the Serbian cultural discourse were destroyed in Kosovo and Metohija, which was and still is far from the truth.

By vehicle of the founding document of the Centre for Coordination, the Federal Government, and the Government of the Republic of Serbia, transferred, in August 2001, the jurisdictions that were previously vested with the Service for the protection of the culture monuments in Kosovo and Metohija to this body.

Drawing on The Hague Convention, the Center for Coordination had, in the course of 2001, called on UNMIK to end vandalism and desecration of the Serbian heritage. The following year, consent was requested from UNMIK to the urgent rehabilitation of the Patriarchate of Peć and the frescoes in the Serbian medieval church near Rudnik. UNMIK replied, in April 2002, that, in reference to these issues, the Coordination Center should address the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the interim “Kosovo” government, a response in contravention of UNMIK’s neutral position, Resolution 1244, Vancouver Declaration, which was reaffirmed at the UNESCO Conference on the enhancement of cooperation in Southeast Europe, held between 4 and 5 April in Paris, when the representative of the self-declared “Republic of Kosovo” was denied participation.

The Sector for Cultural Heritage was set up within the Center for Coordination, tasked with preventing further degradation and dilapidation, and with rehabilitation of consequences that resulted from vandalism, in agreement with and upon the request of the Serbian Orthodox Church and local self-governments. UNMIK, however, neither consented to the professional verification of the factual state on the ground, nor to the commencement of rehabilitation works. To give an example, the attempt to renovate the Monastery of Zociste was precluded as the local Albanian residents put on fire the remnants of this unique cultural monument of the Serbian people, immediately after the prayer for restoration. The same happened at the Monastery of the Holy Archangels near Prizren, jeopardized by the planting of explosive.

The UNESCO publication, issued in autumn 2002, solely mentioned the destruction of the Albanian monuments of culture, without a single reference whatsoever to their Serbian equivalents. Following the reaction of the Center for Coordination, UNESCO sent a letter of apology, explaining that the reports they had used supplied them with such information. We have neither knowledge of who had provided them with data and reports (except for the three aforementioned missions from 1999 and 2000), nor whether UNESCO had a new, corrected edition printed, one that would circulate across the international community and be as available as its predecessor, regardless of all the falsities and the injustice it contained, thus inevitably depicting a false image of the situation in Kosovo.

Indicative is the fact that, until 2004, not a single rapporteur made any mention at the UN Security Council of the vandalism, plundering and destruction of the Serbian and European medieval heritage.

At the invitation of the Center for Coordination, UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura promised, on 13 May 2002, to send, later in May, a French expert in the Middle Ages, for the majority of the destroyed monuments belonged to this period. UNMIK persistently delayed this visit that was never made.

Owing to his sense of responsibility and devotion, Mr. Matsuura attempted to send the third UNESCO mission, whose visit was persistently delayed by UNMIK, under unacceptable pretexts. Despite all the goodwill and energy invested by the UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura, for which we will be ever grateful, unpunished desecration of the unique and exceptional European medieval heritage perpetuated. Equally inadmissible and incomprehensible is the fact that there was no way for those to whom the heritage belongs – the expert teams from the Republic of Serbia - to approach it and restore it.

There was also an attempt to carry out a census of the cultural heritage under the auspices of UNMIK in the review of UNMIK activities concerning culture, Ref. 251/01, under an awkward pretext that the previous one was not compiled in compliance with the international standards, which was, of course, utterly false, and aspired to leave out all the destroyed Serbian sanctuaries, as if they had not existed for centuries, and to change their proprietors. The principle of protecting monuments and cultural goods implies equality in carrying out the census and protection of all the cultural monuments, be they Illyric, Roman, Byzantine, Orthodox, Catholic, Serbian, Turkish, Albanian or Jewish, with no discrimination. Neither UNMIK nor the interim administration in Kosovo and Metohija can alter the list of cultural monuments compiled by the European standards, erase the old and introduce new monuments, unless if it is based on the laws and UNESCO arbitration.

Serbian medieval monuments were not destroyed only in the course of armed conflicts, but also before and after them, which is indicative of the intention and premeditated actions. At work is the planned extermination of material proofs testifying to centuries-long existence of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, with the aim of falsifying history and creating a new state, national and cultural identity, which requires total disappearance of everything that has reaffirmed for centuries the Serbian presence.

This planned extermination of the material proofs in the shape of monuments, evidence of centuries-long creation and rise of the Serbian state and spirituality in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, has reached its summit 11 years ago.

I have to recall the horror that took place in March 2004, and the synchronized and orchestrated barbaric attacks against the Serbian residents in Kosovo and Metohija, with unprecedented destruction of everything that is Serbian, including the Serbian religious objects and cultural goods dating back to the Middle Ages.

In three days of violence perpetrated by the Albanians against the Serbs, on 17, 18 and 19 March 2004, ten Serbs were killed, over 900 persons were severely injured, over 4000 Serbs from six cities and nine villages were expelled. 35 churches and monasteries were destroyed and set ablaze (out of which 18 monuments of special cultural importance), 935 Serbian buildings, out of which 738 Serbian houses, 10 public facilities, schools, post offices, health stations.

All these took place, despite the presence of 38 000 KFOR soldiers from 39 countries, and 8000 UN policemen from 52 countries.

Many graveyards were also desecrated; a large number of valuable icons and other church relics either disappeared or got damaged, including the Registers of christenings, weddings and deaths, testifying to the centuries-long existence of the Serbs in these areas.

The then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan testified to this fact as well, at the session of the Security Council held on 18 March 2004, by saying that (I quote) “the deliberate targeting ... religious sites - such as churches, cemeteries and monasteries - is shameful and inexcusable¹” (end of quote).

The then Director-General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura sent, in April 2004, a mission of renowned experts to appraise the damage inflicted during the barbaric behavior of the Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. Matsuura (I quote) “strongly condemned the attacks on the region’s rich cultural heritage, declaring that it was not only monuments, but also memory and cultural identity that were being destroyed²” (end of quote).

I also need to quote another two paragraphs included by UNESCO Director-General Matsuura into his Report compiled in the wake of the March pogrom that took place in 2004, where he stated that (I quote) “another aspect of UNESCO protective mission could involve the publication of materials concerning the cultural treasures of Kosovo, which are not well known outside the region despite being unique in many ways. It is significant that the destruction of the two Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan some years ago attracted much more media and public attention than the destruction of Kosovo’s Bogorodica Ljeviska Church in Prizren, which is wholly comparable with these Asian monuments from the artistic/historical standpoint. A wider appreciation of the universal significance of Kosovo heritage, embodying as it does an important aspect of Byzantine civilization, would constitute an additional protective measure. The initiation of an information and publication project by UNESCO could be most valuable in that regard” (end of quote) and that (I quote) “such international recognition of major Kosovo monuments would appear to be an urgent matter insofar as it could deliver a message to potential vandals who might be plotting further destruction of the cultural heritage” (end of quote).

¹ S/PV.4928 – 4928. UNSC Session, 18 March 2004

² Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe: Kosovo- Protection and Conservation of a Multi-Ethnic Heritage in Danger (UNESCO Mission Report, 26-30 April 2004)

Furthermore, Mr. Matsuura recommended (I quote) “the introduction of a system for annual monitoring of the cultural heritage in Kosovo, through a permanent committee of UNESCO experts” (end of quote).

Ladies and gentlemen,

Do you believe that, after everything that was said, it is correct and natural for an organization that used to be headed by a person that made such recommendations and assessments, to accept as a member someone who recklessly destroyed the cultural heritage that belongs to others? Imagine a situation where the most valuable cultural heritage of your country is handed to the care of someone who did not participate in its creation, and who tried, on a number of occasions, to raze it to the ground! It would be as if you trusted a lamb to a wolf!

Please reflect on this issue seriously, in order to understand the extent of the troubles that befell the Serbs, for the seizure of something that is dearest to us is looming, something that underlies the gist of our spirituality, identity and endurance.

The frequency of security-related incidents aimed against the cultural heritage of the Serbian people did not drop, not even after the bestial pogrom of 2004.

The Report of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and Metohija (March 2014) , titled “Challenges in the Protection of Immovable Tangible Cultural Heritage in Kosovo”³, drawing on the data collected by the Kosovo police, states that (I quote) “there was an increase in security-related incidents at cultural heritage sites in 2011, 2012 and 2013, compared to previous years” (end of quote). The Report notes that the increase in security-related incidents primarily affects the heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As the Report argues (I quote) “the number of arrests/prosecutions in response to security incidents by the Kosovo Police/judiciary is low”.

Besides, the OSCE has observed that (I quote) “the perpetrators of most incidents affecting religious and cultural heritage sites are unknown and therefore no trials were held for those cases in the courts” and that “although prosecutors have the obligation to follow up regularly on developments of the investigation into the damage to the cultural heritage site, they often fail in this duty” (end of quote).

Are not they discredited by this fact alone, written by UNMIK? Isn't this an argument sufficient to reject the admission of the so-called “Republic of Kosovo” to UNESCO? This is an illustration of the true state of affairs. In a word- there is neither political will, nor the readiness of the interim institutions in Kosovo and Metohija to bring the perpetrators of these barbaric acts to justice. This sends a clear message that the destruction of everything Serbian in Kosovo and Metohija will go unpunished. Why should we believe that it will not be continued in the future?

And it did. While the leaders of the self-declared “Republic of Kosovo” are making every effort to assure the world that they are ready and civilized enough to become a UNESCO member, on Wednesday, 14 October, the Albanian vandals stoned the Dormition of the Mother of God Church in Orahovac, shortly after the holy liturgy was ended. This happened

³ “Challenges in the Protection of Immovable Tangible Cultural Heritage in Kosovo”, Report of the Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Kosovo, 9 April 2014

less than 48 hours before this meeting of ours. The piece of news was broadcast in the Serbian electronic media, but was not taken over by any of the world media. In such manner, the international public was, like all these years, denied an important piece of information. If they cannot stop their vandals at the peak of the campaign to join UNESCO, what will happen later? No matter what they say, they are denied by the reality.

The activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Province are carried out in extremely difficult conditions, with numerous examples of drastic imperilment of human and religious rights, freedom of movement and the work of Orthodox clergy and Orthodox residents in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as ethnically and religiously motivated organized violence, all compounded by the destruction of the Serbian Orthodox heritage, unprecedented in the modern history of Europe.

Four pearls of world heritage: the Monastery of Decani, Patriarchate of Peć, Gracanica and Bogorodica Ljeviska Church are still inscribed on the UNESCO List of the world heritage in danger. The ones requesting UNESCO membership today are the ones who exposed it to danger. Not even today can we hear the words of condemnation of such crimes, or detect readiness to find and punish the perpetrators.

A particularly worrying cause for concern is that one can still read on the walls of the protected cultural monuments the mottoes of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army and threats to the Serbs, and of late, graffiti lionizing the Islamic State and the future caliphate, at the time when the whole international community is investing so much effort to counter this evil. The footages of the destruction of the cultural and religious heritage in the Middle East by ISIS have toured the world and, with a good reason, were met with horror and a sharp condemnation of the global public that put an equation mark between this act and a terrorist act. Similarly, the Albanian extremists, backed by their leaders, destroyed and set ablaze Serbian houses, schools, hospitals and churches in Kosovo and Metohija, particularly in March 2004, and boasted about this fact. And this aspect of rejoicing in demolishing barbaric campaigns should be seriously taken into consideration when thinking about who is trying to come across as the guardian of the Serbian and world heritage. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing the footages of the monstrous destruction of the ancient Palmira, thought to have been founded by Solomon, and home to invaluable treasure of the world cultural heritage protected by UNESCO. These footages have, via media, toured the world, causing horror and sharp condemnation on the part of the international community. Irina Bokova said that “this destruction is a new war crime and an immense loss for the Syrian people and for humanity”.

It is for this reason that UNESCO has continuously expressed its condemnation and embitterment by the destruction of monuments of extreme universal value, on the part of Islamic extremists and terrorist groups, recently reaffirmed by the adoption of the Bonn Declaration. The Republic of Serbia strongly condemns the desecration of religious objects belonging to any creed, anywhere in the world.

On the other hand, should the culprits for the desecration and extermination of the Serbian cultural and Christian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija be rewarded by the UNESCO membership?

Insofar as this is true, or for this reason in particular, the explanation provided by everyone who says that “Kosovo’s” admission to UNESCO would boost the protection of the Serbian

cultural heritage, since not a single Serbian church or monastery has asked for such protection and support, sounds hypocritical. On the contrary.

Not only Serbian, but also European culture, the world's collective memory, are preserved in Kosovo and Metohija; an important civilizational stride of man on planet Earth is preserved in Kosovo and Metohija. It is therefore important that Serbia continues to be the keeper of its, and the world's, cultural treasure, as a full member of UNESCO.

The legal unfoundedness of the request to admit "Kosovo" to UNESCO primarily stems from the fact that Kosovo and Metohija, pursuant to the still applicable and legally binding UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999) and the Constitutional framework for the provisional institutions of self-government in Kosovo, is a territory that constitutes part of the Republic of Serbia under UN administration.

I recall that Annex 2, Paragraph 6 of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) envisages that (I quote) "an agreed number of Yugoslav and Serbian personnel will be permitted to return" to Kosovo and Metohija (end of quote). And it was agreed that hundreds, not thousands, but up to 1000 members of the Serbian forces, tasked solely with the protection of the Serbian heritage, be present in Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia has not as yet benefitted from this still applicable Agreement.

UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999) reaffirms "sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia [*now the Republic of Serbia*] and the other countries of the region" and envisages a "political solution to the Kosovo crisis", based on the principles of the Resolution.

The issue of Kosovo and Metohija is still on the agenda of the UN Security Council, reinforced by the regular, quarterly sessions of the UNSC treating this subject. Moreover, provisional UN administration, headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo (UNMIK) is still in place in Kosovo and Metohija.

Understandably enough, it is not sufficient just to exterminate the centuries-long Serbian presence in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. With the aim of fabricating a historically unfounded, false national and cultural identity of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo on the soil of the Serbian holy land, some even go a step further, defining the Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, wherever they can and wherever they are allowed, as "Kosovan-Albanian", what it is not, neither according to the historical documents, nor according to the law, let alone justice. Distortion of historical materials and historic facts has reached the point where the House of Nemanjic is renamed into the Albanian last name Nimani and the like, all pointing to an unprecedented ruthlessness in falsifying history.

Excellencies,

As you know, Serbia has demonstrated constructiveness and readiness to address all the outstanding issues, in the interest of promoting the quality of life of the inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija, under the EU-facilitated dialogue led in Brussels. Mutually acceptable solutions to complex issues were reached so far in areas of legislation, energy and telecommunications; many other issues are yet to be subject to consideration, including the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church property and the protection of the Serbian cultural heritage.

In this regard, unilateral actions such as the request to admit Kosovo to UNESCO are not in the interest of preserving an atmosphere conducive to the dialogue led with EU-mediation, where extremely important agreements for the stabilization of regional developments and normalization of relations were reached.

Consideration of the request for the admission of Kosovo to UNESCO would, in this context, bear a distinctly negative impact on the dialogue, now in a precarious stage. This would virtually preclude the reaching of a mutually acceptable solution in the area of the Serbian cultural heritage, through dialogue. For us, it is one of the most sensitive issues, having in mind that we are speaking about the cultural and religious heritage of extraordinary spiritual and civilizational value, dating back to IX century.

Furthermore, the very consideration of “Kosovo’s” UNESCO membership leads to divisions among the UNESCO Member States and its politicization, contrary to the founding principles, mission and spirit of the Organization, and negatively affects the trend of stabilization of regional affairs on their path of European integration.

I have presented the reasons that support the fact that now is not the time to consider the request to admit “Kosovo” to UNESCO, and the reasons explaining why these issues should be regulated through dialogue, and not through unilateral acts that will not contribute to our common goal- to create conditions for a normal life for all the inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija, and unhindered integration of the region into the EU.

I would like to draw your attention to the book you will find in front of you, titled “Christian Heritage in Kosovo and Metohija- Historical and Spiritual Heartland of the Serbian People”, which I present as gifts to the Heads of your state and international organizations.

This monograph is a detailed testimony, not only to the singular artistic power and beauty of the medieval Christian sanctuaries, a contribution of the Serbian culture to the world culture, but also to the centuries-long efforts of Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church invested in the creation and maintenance of the spiritual and cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, and the importance it has, not only for my country and its people, but for the whole civilized world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija neither belongs to any specific time not to any single generation. Its significance is timeless and universal, for it belongs to mankind.

Finally, I will quote one of the most eminent Byzantologists and Professors of Art and Architecture at Princeton University, who published, in a renowned London magazine, a text about the destruction of the medieval European Christian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija. Professor Slobodan Djurcic concludes (I quote): “It does not matter if you are a Serb or an Albanian. These churches and monasteries belong to everyone, they constitute an integral part of European heritage. Our anger should be tantamount to the anger we would feel if the French destroyed Mona Lisa”.

I would like to take only a few more minutes of your kind attention. We shall see a short clip titled “The reasons explaining why Kosovo cannot join UNESCO”. I also give you this footage as a supporting document and an illustration of my today’s address.

Thank you!