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IPI Opening Ceremony Speech

His Excellency Mr Boris Tadic, the President of the Republic of Serbia

IPI World Congress Opening Ceremony, Belgrade, June 15th

My speech is going to be in Serbian. I am the Serbian president. From the beginning, I want to thank you very much for coming here to Belgrade and the Serbia, which is today legitimate democracy. I am very proud to see all of you here. I am sure that you have had an opportunity to see the tremendous progress which we have after democratic changes in our country and what we have done in the past eight years, but we have to do a lot more in the period ahead of us. We are very optimistic; we are doing well even though we are facing with the challenges. Some of those challenges previous speaker mentioned few minutes ago. I totally agree with you that this is one of the main preconditions in building democracy in Serbia, to find the criminals, arrest them, to capture them and create a better society for all of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, your excellencies, ministers, distinguished journalists, friends of my country, friends of democracy and truth from around the world.

Indeed, it is my great pleasure to see you today in Belgrade, in Serbia, a country that is searching for its European future, country that is building a democracy in very complex circumstances of recent history in Southeast Europe. Especially after the nineties – one of the most difficult and saddest decades in our history.

Ladies and gentlemen, I truly believe that the nineties are behind Serbia and all other countries of former Yugoslavia. It was a decade when values and our beliefs were destroyed, and sometimes even the civilization itself in our region was threatened. There were many tragic consequences, violence, innocent victims, among journalists as well, in all our societies. That was a decade when the truth was denied, a decade when value of human life was denied, a decade when the fundamental values of our civilization were threatened.

After a whole decade of denying shared values, any society would need a lot of time to change the way things are and return them back to a normal state of affairs. After a sudden turn from the rule of law to lawlessness, it takes much more time to take a society back to a system where law is paramount. If we critically analyse the achievements of countries in the Southeast Europe, including Serbia, during these eight years at the beginning of the 21st century, after the nineties, we can conclude that an exceptional success has been achieved – especially if we consider the circumstances we were living in during the nineties, when human lives were threatened every day, when the respect for independence of all individuals was threatened exactly every day, when the freedom of reporting and journalism, the freedom of convening the truth, was threatened every day.

I am very critical about our reality during the nineties. But, just like you are free journalists who respect free journalism, allow me to be a free politician who respects free politics and say that, while there was truthful reporting from ex-Yugoslavia and Serbia, as well as correct information about the evil that was happening in the region of Southeast Europe, there was also a lot of untruthful information and stereotyping. An inertia in reporting, which was so easy from the viewpoint of professionalism, but not enough truthful from the viewpoint of reporting the objective truth.

As one of the fighters for democracy in my country, I myself have witnessed the way in which facts from the Southeast Europe were communicated to the world. I say this because, even today, I am making an enormous effort, together with other democratic representatives of our society, to change the impression about Serbia and the whole of Southeast Europe as soon as possible, since only truth can move us forward. Fighting the stereotypes and inertia – political inertia, journalistic inertia, economic inertia – we are changing our reality, each day. It is an enormous and very difficult undertaking. I remind you, we are a society which existed outside the rule of law for a whole decade. And now, we must bring this same society back to the rule of law. It takes time to achieve that.

Even today, Serbia, as a European democracy, faces difficult challenges. Not only the identification of murderers of journalists, but also the search for those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and the cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, are preconditions for democracy building, fundamental preconditions for reconciliation among the nations that share this, Southeast European region with us. But simple words of apology to the victims of crimes are also necessary for reconciliation. As a president of Serbia, I have apologised to all nations in the Southeast Europe which were the victims of crimes somebody committed in the name of my people. But I cannot forget the fact that horrible crimes were committed against my people> That is also the truth, not often enough told by the world media. I am still awaiting an apology from representatives of other nations of ex-Yugoslavia for victims, innocent victims, among my own Serbian people. I have done it first, because I believed that it should be done, but it is not hard to make an apology if that, among other things, contributes to our shared civilization.

Today, Serbia is facing other difficult challenges. One of these is the question of future status of Kosovo and Metohija, our southern province. There can be no doubt that the recognition of the illegally proclaimed independence of Kosovo and Metohija is the violation of the international law. There can be no doubt that the Albanians in Kosovo have their legitimate rights which I respect. There can be no doubt that in the past in Serbia certain acts were committed to deny democracy and these legitimate rights, but there is also no doubt that Serbian democracy wants a solution acceptable both to Belgrade and Pristina, a solution which would not violate the international law, a solution which does not constitute a threat to many other countries with similar problems, and a solution which respects legitimate rights of Serbia and the Serbian people.

Just like any other nation and any other country, my nation and my country have their legitimate interests. I want to point out that by defending these legitimate national interests, we by no means wish to threaten legitimate interests of any other neighbouring nation, including the Albanian nation. Such is the state of Serbian democracy today, at

the beginning of the 21st century, and I am deeply convinced that it will remain the same in the future.

Just like we are prepared to face the difficult challenge of cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, which is, I believe, nearing its end, because Serbia has delivered 43 persons out of 46 accused of war crimes to the Tribunal so far – there are three of them left – today we are also prepared to reopen negotiations about the future of Kosovo, taking into consideration legitimate interests of Albanians, but also defending legitimate interests of Serbs, and searching for a peaceful, democratic, European solution in our region.

Ladies and gentlemen, as witnesses of the world's reality and challenges facing the world today, at the beginning of the 21st century, you have a chance to relate these challenges to those existing in the Southeast Europe. Today you are in Serbia, in Belgrade, in a country that is, from the strategical point of view, the central country of the Southeast Europe, since it neighbours all other countries of this region. In this sense, Serbia is the strategical backbone of the Southeast Europe. Political stability of Serbia is the necessary precondition for political stability of the entire Southeast Europe. Development of democracy in Serbia is precondition for democracy development in all other countries. Every economic and political crisis in Serbia creates immediate consequences in the countries of the region, as we could witness during the nineties.

Allow me to say a few more words.

Modern civilization faces two great challenges: the lack of energy policy and the production of food. At the same time, we are facing challenges in our region and we are going to solve all our problems in the period ahead of us. I am totally sure that we have enough capacity to do that in the next few years. The main precondition for that is full membership of our country in the European Union and I am totally sure that only full participation of all Southeast European countries in the European Union is the solution to our common problems: social policy, industrial development, improvement in technology field. In that sense I am going to assure you that after the presidential and parliamentary elections Serbia will form a pro-European and democratic government which will be a cornerstone of stability in our region. At the same time, we are going to insist on democratic values. When I am talking about values, I mean capturing all indictees, full cooperation with ICTY, freedom of the media, justice, they are also preconditions for developing our country and achieving final strategical goal, which means European Union future. In that sense, we are going to do everything that is in our power to achieve this results. This is not easy, we are raedy to do everything that is possible, but at the same time, I am appealing on all of you to take into the consideration the fact that we are facing with real challenges today. Which means that we are defending our legitimate interests in an normal, European, peaceful way. And in that sense, you can count on us in terms of freedom of the media, in terms of peaceful policy, in terms of building democratic institutions, not only in Serbia but also in the region. This is my policy; this is Serbia's democracy in the beginning of the 21st century.

Thank you for participating in this event. I hope that you are going to see so many improvements here in Belgrade and in Serbia, even though you are going to see some consequences of the dreadful decade of the nineties in our streets.