



Belgrade, 28 April 2014
140428/03
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

S P E E C H

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton at the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

"Madame Speaker, Prime Minister, Honourable Members of Parliament,

Can I thank you so much for the warm welcome that you have given me during my visit today. It is a truly a great honour for me to address you as members of the new Serbian Parliament - and so soon after you have taken up your seats.

I know that you have an immensely important role for the duration of this parliament, taking forward essential reforms for your country. The volume of new legislation that you will scrutinize and the debate that you will have it will be unprecedented. You will also of course have a growing role in monitoring the proper implementation of the laws that you will pass. I wish you all possible success in the work that you will do.

When you, Mr Prime Minister, came to Brussels in January for the launch of Serbia's EU accession talks, you spoke of your emotion at the sight of the Serbian flag next to those of the other European countries. And of how this was, for you, the most important moment in Serbia's history since the end of the Second World War.

Mr Prime Minister, I think you are absolutely right to feel that emotion and that pride. Serbia has always been part of Europe. And now you will join us in the European Union. It is the start of a new chapter in our relationship. A chapter that we will write together.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 584 9780 - Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu @EUHighRepSpox
Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu @AshtonSpox Maja
Sebastien Brabant +32 460 75 09 98 - Sebastien.Brabant@ec.europa.eu
Eamonn Prendergast +32 460 75 32 93 - Eamonn.Prendergast@ec.europa.eu
Follow us on Twitter @eu_eas
www.facebook.com/EuropeanExternalActionService
www.eeas.europa.eu

I know that there will be many obstacles to be overcome in setting yourself on this course towards EU membership. It is significant and important that all the parties represented in this new parliament share the same goal of EU accession.

I also believe that now you can be the example to others in your region, and show what can be achieved through hard work, leadership and, yes, tough choices. And we can show that hard work, leadership and the determination to make those tough choices will be recognized by the European Union and by the wider International Community.

There is no better proof of the successful relationship we have been building together in recent years than the results you have achieved in the normalisation of your relations with Pristina. Believe me, I know at first hand the kind of difficulties you have had to overcome to make the progress that you have made.

So I want to pay my tribute to both the current and the previous Government, for their courage, political maturity and statesmanship in the Dialogue with Pristina. Today, Serbia is praised everywhere for the political leadership it has shown in this Dialogue. You stand as an inspiration to others in this region and beyond.

Serbia is now a candidate country for the European Union. But you are also an important political partner.

First of all, as I have mentioned, you are important in this region. Your contributions to better cooperation and improved relations with your neighbours are pivotal to the stability of the entire Western Balkans. Now you are our partner in the accession process. I want to look forward to you playing an even greater role in fostering inclusive and effective regional ties. I believe you can help make an important contribution in helping Bosnia and Herzegovina break out of the current political stalemate. And I know, Mr Prime Minister, it is very high on your list of early visits.

Second, you have an important role to play as a partner promoting shared values in our shared neighbourhood. There is no question that our foreign policy in the neighbourhood has been tested over these last four years like never before. In the South, through dramatic changes called the Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya and in Syria. And of course most recently there events to the East, in Ukraine, where I am committed to de-escalating tension, to engaging in meaningful and inclusive dialogue for a lasting solution, and ensuring a stable, prosperous and democratic future for all of Ukraine's citizens.

And thirdly, you are also a partner of growing stature in the international arena. I applaud your contribution to the EU NAVFOR-Atalanta military mission which helps to combat piracy off the coast of Africa. And your contributions to European Union missions in Somalia and perhaps soon in Mali. Sometimes these may seem as far off places, but the security challenges they throw up are ones that affect us all. We need to work together to overcome them.

In 2015, Serbia will take on the Chairmanship in Office of the OSCE. It is a clear signal of the confidence the International Community in you and in the role that you will play.

Madame Speaker, Prime Minister, Honourable Members of Parliament, let me say a few word on the accession process, the cornerstone of our relations.

It is a rigorous one. Strict but fair conditionality is the rule of the game. That means addressing the fundamentals first. Focusing on the values and principles our Union is built upon - the consolidation of a truly democratic society - respect for fundamental rights and freedom of expression.

At the heart of that process is the rule of law. Progress here determines the speed of the accession process as a whole. It secures full respect for fundamental values and underpins that truly democratic society.

But hand in hand with the rule of law, the ongoing economic challenges that we all face in Europe means we need to put key emphasis on economic governance too, as well as competitiveness and growth, so that we see sustained recovery in Serbia as we wish to see sustained recovery across Europe. These economic reforms will help Serbia too, to meet the economic accession criteria, converge with the EU economy, and bring about jobs and better social conditions in society.

As I said before, the Dialogue with Pristina has been a real success. And comprehensive normalisation of relations is a key part of the accession process. So we will continue the Dialogue. We will build on the agreement that was reached on 19 April last year; we will continue with implementation and move forward with the process.

And of course, under the Parliament's resolution of December 2013, you have a hugely important role in driving the accession process forward too, including through the vital work that will be done by your parliamentary committees. I look forward to the opportunity to support you in that work.

I have had of course the opportunity to discuss these issues today with President Nikolić and with the Prime Minister and with the Deputy Prime Minister. It has been the focus of our discussions all day.

Let me say that I am really impressed by the high level of ambition that I hear from the Government today: the strong priority it sets in achieving these goals, and the determination to reach those goals as quickly as possible in support of the people of this country.

So let me stress that we will help you. Through our expert advice and targeted assistance, we will be with you every single step of this journey.

Honourable Members,

When the European integration process began over half a century ago, many people doubted it could work. But the European Union has bolstered our peace, our security and our prosperity. It has become the largest integrated economic space and trading bloc in the world. Six founding members have become twenty-eight, attracted by the promise of mutual benefit, democracy and rule of law, combined with the respect for free choices of sovereign nations.

As Serbia embarks on its own accession process. I congratulate you, I stand by you, and I look forward very much to welcoming you as a partner in the European Union.

Thank you."
