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**“THE BURDEN OF HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS  
AND THE WAY FORWARD IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA  
AND THE BALKANS”**

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Dr. Westad,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly pleased and honoured to address the audience in this eminent institution. The honour is all the greater also because I know that the International History Department of the London School of Economics has been pronounced the best University History Department in 2001. It is with particular satisfaction that I also follow the development of cooperation of the School with Yugoslavia within the Yugoslav Initiative. I am sure that it will contribute to the further study and even better knowledge of Yugoslav history and Yugoslavia's current problems in British academia.

All of us who study history or are involved in politics know very well that the Balkans is often spoken of as the “powder keg” of Europe, that it is fraught with conflicts and wars that frequently spill over to other parts of our continent. At the beginning of the last century, the well-known British publicist John Ellis Barker wrote that the Balkans and Asia Minor occupied the most important strategic position in the world. He went on to say that they are the nucleus and the centre of the old world and divide, as well as

bridge, three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. When World War One started, Foreign Minister of Czarist Russia Sazonov spoke of a “fateful concourse of circumstances in the Balkans”, while, in the eve of the War, the British Charge d’Affaires in Berlin reported to Sir Edward Gray that, speaking of the region, the German Chancellor made frequent references to “those Balkan troubles”. Unfortunately, the history of the Balkans provides ample evidence that the term “powder keg” is fairly merited, although not quite fair. Other parts of Europe have had their share of conflicts as well. Yet, many conflicts in the Balkans would have been avoided, had great powers not taken part in Balkan affairs with their plans, aspirations and interests. Once they crossed with Balkan ethnic and religious complexities, territorial aspirations and the ambitions of local political leaders, instability and conflict ensued, the sorry history of which is well-known. This legacy continues to burden the Balkans and its peoples even today. Obsession with the past and the aspiration to “rectify” it post festum served only to provoke new conflicts.

As we thought that the burden had been committed to history, the Balkans erupted in a new drama in the last decade of the last century all over again. It proved, though, that, unlike the political leaders and perhaps even the peoples of the region, the great powers had learned the historical lesson and refused to get involved in the conflict that followed the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. It is this refusal that mirrors the most important change that has occurred in European relations most tellingly. The Balkans is no longer an arena of confrontation among great powers, and its strategic importance, even though still significant, has no longer the same decisive weight it used to have throughout European history.

In crucial moments in the early 1990s, the political and intellectual elites of the former Yugoslavia sensed that the existent system was to be inevitably transformed. The system may have been more liberal than the one that prevailed in East Europe at the same time, yet its roots were much deeper and much more difficult to eradicate. In principle, two routes were available: fundamental reform, modernization and the joining of European integration flows trends or a return to the pre-communist situation with the revival of all nationalist, territorial and State aspirations, national myths and their instrumentalization. The political and intellectual elites found the other route simpler and more acceptable. Some used it as a vehicle to maintain power, some to take it. In any

case, to political leaders and to population masses, that route seemed much easier: instead of painstaking work on the transformation of political and economic systems they embarked upon a political and media manipulation. Existential problems were presented as insignificant and irrelevant in contrast to the problems of the nation, the State and nation-building. It is only today that many, although not all, comprehend the price of this policy.

Certainly, the highest price has been paid by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – Serbia and Montenegro. The policy conducted in the last ten years of the twentieth century not only did not understand, nor did it want to understand, the direction and meaning of the objective and necessary social changes in contemporary Europe, particularly in its Eastern part, but sought to oppose the process in the direct way and impede it. In that way Yugoslavia found itself isolated and in conflicts with European integration trends. Some ten years ago, by most important yardsticks Yugoslavia was closer to the West European integration than any country of East Europe. Today, as a consequence of the policy conducted in the last decade of the twentieth century, it is behind them. We are therefore faced with a difficult task of making up for what has been lost and, at the same time, of carrying out the political and economic transformation, carried out by the countries of East Europe that are now about to join the European Union soon. Those countries, however, had the good fortune of not having to deal with the consequences of the disintegration of State, conflicts and sanctions, a large number of refugees and other problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The democratic changes that took place in Yugoslavia at the end of the year 2000 signified much more than a simple change of power.

To begin with, a thorough change of political and economic system has been initiated, not only with regard to the dramatic period in the last decade of the last century, but also with regard to the overall development since World War Two.

Second, the process of redefinition of the common State of Serbia and Montenegro is underway.

Third, a new foreign policy is being conceptualized and carried out, adjusted to profound changes and international relations in Europe and in Yugoslavia's neighbourhood, primarily to the change of the objective position and international role of Yugoslavia.

Even in the best of circumstances, a simultaneous evolvement of such processes would be very complex indeed. In the case of Yugoslavia, it is complicated by the serious economic problems that the country has inherited, by the consequences of wars and sanctions and by the adverse developments that the Serbs, Montenegrins and other non-Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija have experienced notwithstanding the efforts of the international community, with which, let me point out, Yugoslavia actively cooperates.

In the situation, three basic results have been achieved.

First, a final and irreversible political shift has been made in the direction of changing the system. Serious reform programmes have been started and laws have been adopted, aimed at creating preconditions for the inclusion of the country into European integration processes. Political differences among democratic forces concern the speed and methods of change rather than the need for it. Return to the old ways is no longer possible and all democratic forces are in agreement on that count.

Second, there exists a clear resolve to reform the Federal State, the common State of Serbia and Montenegro. This is the point beyond which disintegration will not proceed, and the two Republics have undertaken to introduce a high level of autonomy.

Third, Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia and Montenegro, has come out of international isolation and taken its place in the family of nations after a long period of crisis and instability. Yugoslavia has been readmitted into almost all important international organizations and maintains diplomatic relations with almost all countries of the world. It is our intention to be a reliable, rational and predictable partner, a factor of stability rather than a factor of risk or a participant in conflicts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now say few words about the situation in South East Europe.

All countries of our region have democratically elected governments. All of them have, as their strategic goal, a linkage with European integration trends and aspire to join the European Union. Foreign presence in the region, primarily of NATO in Kosovo and Metohija and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is very pronounced. All countries of the region are either members of the Alliance or will be admitted soon, like Romania and Bulgaria, for instance, or, with the exception of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina that have applied to do so, have joined its Programme "The Partnership for Peace". Almost all countries are faced with serious social and economic problems, and some still have to solve the question of internal political stability. The States created in the territory of the former Yugoslavia have had to deal with the consequences of the disintegration of that country and the wars conducted in the last decade of the twentieth century; they had to address the problem of a large number of refugees and displaced persons, enormous material losses and, particularly in the case of my country, the consequences of international isolation and the need to punish those responsible for war crimes and to cooperate with the Hague Tribunal.

Outside influence on the situation in the region of South East Europe is manifested in three ways:

First, United Nations and NATO Missions act in the direction of calming down and controlling the post-crisis situation.

Second, linkage with the European Union and NATO calls for a prior solution of regional problems or at least for easing the tensions. Potential spillover of crisis from South East Europe would be incompatible with the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, so that regional stabilization and, by extension, the stabilization of individual countries has become a priority and a precondition of any integration, with the European Union in the first place.

Third, the struggle against international terrorism accelerates the process of the strengthening of Euro-Atlantic military and security structures in the region, particularly the admission of some countries into NATO. At the same time, to a degree, the region has lost significance and priority to Central Asia, Caucasus or the Middle East. This is mirrored in a decrease of the presence of the United States and an increase of the role of

the European Union and some other European countries. However, the change does not imply that the resurgence of crises in South East Europe would be tolerated because of the need to address the problems in Afghanistan or Iraq with calm and stability in the "hinterland".

Generally speaking, the majority of the countries of the region of South East Europe are passing through a period of post-conflict consolidation and profound and complex internal changes and strive to define their place and, for that matter, the place of the entire region in the new international constellation. And although those adaptations are seemingly conditioned by military and political realities, they are determined by and large by the deliberate choice of the leading political forces in those countries to develop the political and economic systems that have prevailed in the countries of West Europe for decades and proved efficient and viable in contrast to different social models practiced elsewhere at various junctures in history.

In the circumstances, Yugoslavia's foreign-policy priorities now include:

First, integration with Euro-Atlantic structures and membership, one day, in the European Union. To that end, it has set some very concrete goals: conclusion of the Association and Stabilization Agreement, admission into the Council of Europe which we are about to achieve and the joining of the Partnership for Peace.

Second, normalization and development of relations with its neighbours, primarily with the former Yugoslav Republics, which is particularly significant for its citizens and refugees who have found shelter in Yugoslavia, as well as the strengthening of regional cooperation.

Third, balanced relations with great powers; and, finally, the re-establishment, within the bounds of possibility, of traditional ties and cooperation with the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Participation and assistance by the international community in the consolidation of the situation in Yugoslavia and the lifting of its isolation is of paramount importance. We are well aware of our international obligations and we intend to honour them. This is true, in particular, of Yugoslavia's respect for commitments and obligations under the Dayton Agreement, which is evidenced by an ever more extensive development of our relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In relation to Kosovo and Metohija, we are not satisfied with the position of non-Albanians in the Province, particularly with the level of security and the speed of IDPs returns. Nevertheless, we are determined to cooperate with international representatives in a constructive manner and to address, in cooperation with them, all problems in accordance with the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244. Kosovo and Metohija, we are aware, will have a different status from the one it had in previous Serbian and/or Yugoslav States and the influence of Belgrade will be different from the one it exercised in the past. However, I would like to recall that all relevant United Nations resolutions speak of it as part of the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Within this framework, we are ready to talk about its status openly. For, after all, any change of borders, especially in the Balkans, brings along unforeseeable and perilous consequences and, in our estimation, the best way to proceed is to build a common future in Europe in which borders and minority problems will lose its importance.

Yugoslavia is prepared to cooperate in full with the Hague Tribunal. Indeed, this is a very delicate issue for us, with an inherent threat of internal destabilization. However, some very important steps have been made in that regard. Slobodan Milosevic and a number of other indictees have been transferred to The Hague and the Law on Cooperation with the Tribunal has been adopted. Continued cooperation does not concern Yugoslavia's international obligations alone. Unless there is facing up to what has happened, and without the individualization of guilt, no real political change in Yugoslav society will be possible and Yugoslavia will not definitively return to the international community.

We in Belgrade, and Podgorica, are aware that there continues to exist certain mistrust and that we are expected to provide new confirmations of the seriousness and irreversibility of the changes in our country. Nevertheless, we have completed the first phase of the return into the international community. We must act in it as a member that still has serious problems to solve, but that is predictable and rational in each and every situation. We believe that time has come that we be looked at as a partner with whom it is possible to talk and work without conditionality. Indeed, we may have a few problems to address and some of our partners may raise some issue or other; yet, these problems and

issues should be looked at through the same prism our partners use in their relations with other States. The policy of setting conditions should be abandoned.

Such a treatment of Yugoslavia would facilitate the speed and scope of the changes in my country. Further reforms would be easier to carry out if the treatment that we have in the international community changed more speedily. In that case, we shall be even more firm and predictable as a partner. Finally, our European and Euro-Atlantic orientation will be strengthened.

We are well-aware of our obligations. We know that by internal consolidation and reforms we shall contribute to the stabilization of the region. The new State of Serbia and Montenegro, with a high level of autonomy of the two Republics, will bring to an end disintegration processes in the region. Certainly, we shall solve even the most delicate issues easier if we are treated as an equal and reliable partner with whom dialogue can be conducted even on the most delicate problems. This will strengthen our European and Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Thank you for your attention, Ladies and Gentlemen.