

## Speech for the SYLFF Prize Award Ceremony

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, friends of The Nippon Foundation and The Tokyo Foundation,

It has been fifteen years since I was honored to receive a SYLFF fellowship as a postgraduate student in the Law School at the University of Belgrade. The title of this fellowship at my alma mater, "*For the future leaders of the world*", was very tempting and promising, particularly for a young lawyer at the very beginning of his university career. And I was proud.

At that time I dreamed of becoming a full professor of law, teaching Civil Procedure. Therefore, I used the fellowship to spend some time at the University of Saarbruecken in Germany to gather literature for my master's thesis under the title "*A Proposition for Renewal of Litigation Procedure*". I am grateful to you for providing for me this opportunity.

But one's life is not to be predicted and not all dreams are to be fulfilled. The river of life sometime goes beyond our expectations, beyond our dreams. The Federation of Yugoslavia, that was putting together 22 million people of different ethnicities, six republics, two autonomous provinces, was splitting as a result of substantial changes in Europe—the fall of the Berlin Wall and break-up of the Soviet Union. The country's elite in every republic and in every province was faced with the choice to introduce changes in society that would replace the socialist economy with a market economy, that would restructure not only the economy, but would also unavoidably reorganize the sharing of power in society and bring democracy to the people. Instead, they choose to introduce nationalist rhetoric in politics. They chose to reveal the beast of national hatred. While claiming they were fighting for their people, their nations and their territories, they were fighting for their privileged position in society—against any changes, against the future of millions. The Federation of Yugoslavia was splitting along the lines of the republic borders, through a very bloody war that shook Europe in the 90's. In Serbia alone, where I live, this war brought 1 million refugees, and thousands killed and wounded. Even more people were killed in Bosnia and in Croatia.

Local elites' propaganda was successful in explaining all of these atrocities that brought misery to the people's lives as a result of the actions of "others", those who belong to another nation, to another ethnic group. There was always somebody else to blame. In 1993, I joined the Center for Antiwar Action in Belgrade. It was a non-governmental organization that put together a group of people who wanted to stop the war, to raise their voices against the nationalistic propaganda, to act and help those whose basic human rights were violated—only because they belonged to another ethnic group, and because they were different—and to help those who were threatened because they did not want to go to war.

These same people, now close friends of mine, created the Civic Alliance of Serbia, a political party that set as its primary goal, not to mislead with propaganda and not to focus on what others do, but to try to find answers within the society we live in, within Serbia. This group decided to fight our own government that brought us all into the war, avoiding changes and avoiding responsibilities. I was honored to join them because they were a very small group of intellectuals in Serbia who insisted on rationalism as opposed to emotionalism in politics, who were most decisively against nationalism and against the war, and were first to say that the future of the country lay within the European Union and within NATO. Today, I preside over this political party, and am gratified that these goals are also shared by the strongest political parties in the country, by the vast majority of the political elite and by society of the new and democratic Serbia, after the changes of 2000.

But fighting for a cause always has its price. At the very end of 1998, the government introduced a new Law on Universities by which the autonomy of the universities was abandoned. A group of us, professors and teaching assistants in the Law School, went on strike to protest this law and to protest the dictatorship that was undermining freedom even in science. Ten of us were fired. It was very difficult for me to explain to my daughter, who was then 7, why I was no longer going to my university every morning. It was even more difficult to envisage the future for my infant son who was then only six months old. Three months later, in March of 1999, the country was bombed by the NATO Alliance. I was drafted to fight against it. I never defended the government but defended my own family and other families in Serbia who were not to blame for what the government was doing in Kosovo.

The next three months were the most difficult for my family. However, what we experienced cannot be compared to what families of millions of refugees were going through or to the suffering of those who had lost their beloved relatives. It can never be even closely compared to the suffering of Bosniaks, Croats, Albanians or Serbs who were victims of war crimes, such as in Srebrenica in Bosnia.

On the day the bombing ended I knew only one thing, it must never be repeated. A government must never be so irresponsible against its own citizens to involve them all in such a bombing. Pride is the smallest price to be paid to save one's life. Life is a miracle, life brings everything we can imagine and much more than we can not even imagine, while pride only feeds vanity. This is why brave politicians from a range of different parties gathered immediately after the bombing stopped and formed a coalition called The Alliance for Change. We organized protests throughout the country in order to introduce politics back into the country, to relieve people from fear and to provoke early elections. We did it in order to oust the government from power and introduce freedom and democracy.

Although we won the elections in September 2000, the government decided not to accept the results and call for a rerun. That decision provoked protests all over the country. When we decided to organize a big rally in Belgrade on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, I was not aware it was the day that will bring historic change to the country. Like other leaders who

were bringing protestors to Belgrade from other cities, I came with thousands of very decisive men and women from Uzice, a city three hours by car southwest of Belgrade. When I called my wife to say I would return to Belgrade, she was calm, saying that our children were playing with her and that I should not return home until all it was over. She said: "It has to be over today. Do not come home until it is all over, one way or another." As a person, she is not even close to the Goddesses in Greek tragedies. She is not cruel, decisive or rude. She was a very caring mother that day, understanding that we as a family, likewise the entire Serbian society, had already crossed the line of no return. She felt something that we both were not able to rationally understand, that is, that it was The Day. One million people gathered in the main square of Belgrade, in front of the Federal Parliament.

Her words were with me while I entered the Federal Parliament under fire, together with only a few other protestors who I did not even know. We were all crying from tear gas that was used by the police to break-up the riot. In the Parliament building, a group of 50 policemen, who until minutes before were shooting rubber bullets and throwing tear gas, were now shaking and scared to death. They only asked that we help and save them. That was The End, or The Beginning, a very new beginning.

I returned home at 6 a.m. My spouse, daughter and son were asleep. I joined them. After only three hours of sleep, the first thing I did was to turn on the television set and to see if the national television station was still controlled by the people or had been retaken by the government. I was relieved to hear from the very few sentences being broadcast that the government was history.

Three weeks later, I was in New York to raise the national flag at the UN. One month later, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2000 I was appointed foreign minister and served in three governments over three and a half years, until April this year.

In spring 2001, I presented a new foreign policy to the federal MPs which first stated that Serbia and Montenegro wished to join the EU and was ready to fulfill the required conditions. Second, the new foreign policy stated that we would be a region-oriented country, paving the way for the reconciliation between the former Yugoslav republics and improving economic and political cooperation within the Balkans. Third, it noted that we would do our best to acquire a balanced relationship with the most influential countries in the World, and fourth, that we would try to preserve good relationships with countries in South America, Asia, and Africa, and to improve these relationships based on mutual respect of economic and political interests.

Looking back, I am honored to say that during my three and a half years as foreign minister, my country joined the UN, the OSCE, and finally the Council of Europe. We are now included in all regional initiatives, including the Stability Pact, Southeast European Cooperation Initiative, Adriatic Ionian Initiative, Central European Initiative, South East European Cooperation Process, and Black Sea Economic Cooperation. We did not have diplomatic relationships with Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina; our diplomatic relationships with Albania, the U.S.A., Germany, France, and the United

Kingdom, were broken. Today, I can proudly say that we have excellent relationship with each of these countries.

We inherited the UN sanctions, trade embargo, and embargo in trading military equipment. All these sanctions and embargoes are behind us, we have lifted them. We inherited a monitoring mechanism with respect to the human right situation in our country that was introduced by the United Nations Human Rights Commission. There is no longer a need for this mechanism; it has been abolished because the country presented its first Report in accordance with its obligations under the International Covenant of the Human and Political Rights. We have ratified all optional protocols to the Covenants, and finally after acceding to the Council of Europe, we ratified the European Convention on Human Rights. Although not all dreams ever come true, some dreams are realized. While presiding over the National Council for Human Rights since 1995, I have dreamed of living in Serbia with a clean human rights record. I used my ministerial position to fill all of the legal gaps, to complete the legal framework and change practices. Besides the UNHCR, international NGO's such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch have also recognized the improvements made in Serbia since 2000 until today.

Being the first foreign minister of Yugoslavia (later Serbia and Montenegro) to ever officially visit Israel in more than 50 years, and the first to officially visit Turkey in 12 years, or to visit Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Iran, I tried to link Serbia and Montenegro with others in the world who are making many efforts to improve understanding between civilizations. However, following the priorities of our foreign policy which I myself defined, I focused on the Balkans. Being aware of the importance of regional cooperation, but also of the wounds that must be healed in respect to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of my time was spent on improving cooperation with neighboring countries, particularly the former Yugoslav republics. We signed a border agreement with Macedonia and a preliminary border agreement on the Prevlaka Peninsula with Croatia, by which we have abolished the UN mission there.

Today, I am welcomed in any capacity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Croatia, and in Albania, and I keep going there because I see my future in improving cooperation among Balkan countries. It is what I would like to do in the coming years because there are remaining problems to be resolved. Before all, it is the status of Kosovo. As part of a broader issue, I am interested in the Serb-Albanian relationship. It may be of a crucial importance for the stability of the entire region. It is not only my perception. As is with many other European governments, and the Japanese government is also aware of the importance of this issue for the peace and prosperity in the Balkans. Several months ago I visited Tokyo to attend a major conference organized by the government of Japan aiming to reintroduce world attention to the Balkans and boost economic cooperation and growth in the region. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the aid my country has received from the people of Japan over the last several years. We in Serbia and in Montenegro highly respect the Japanese and their generosity.

Sustainable peace and sincere reconciliation in the Balkans cannot be achieved unless those responsible for war crimes and other atrocities are punished. This is why as foreign

minister I agreed to chair the National Council for the Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal for war crimes. We sent 22 inductees to the Tribunal. Only a few remain. These were challenging political decisions because Serbian society is not yet prepared to fully understand that war crimes have been committed and that responsibility lies not only with those who committed crimes but also with those who commanded and did not do their best to prevent war crimes on time. This activity is not helping my political career and not improving my political approval rating. Nevertheless, I believe that this is something we all owe to the victims and their relatives, something we owe to the highest moral standards, and something we owe to our membership in the UN. It is a matter of personal political courage and responsibility; it is a matter of consciousness. What else can leadership mean if not to put more and more effort into helping other people in society to understand and share the highest moral values, not only to follow but to be encouraged to demand more responsibility for themselves and to inspire them to ask to take the lead.

In ending this long speech, I would like to thank you all, to thank The Nippon Foundation for helping me when it was important, at the very beginning of my career. And my special thanks go to those who decided to award me now, while I am at another crossroads. I accept this award not only as recognition for what I did but as encouragement to do more and better in the future. Thank you.