Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you for having convened this session of the United Nations Security Council so that we may once more discuss the situation in Kosovo and Metohija. I am pleased to acknowledge the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lamberto Zannier, with whom I recently had a productive meeting in Belgrade.

Tomorrow is the tenth anniversary of the NATO bombing of my country that began on March 24th, 1999. I would like to recall that this tragic event, which lasted a full 78 days, was not undertaken with the approval of this body. During a three-month period in which cities and villages were bombed everyday, 2,500 civilians were killed—including 89 children—and 12,500 more were injured. The number of victims does not include those who subsequently succumbed to leukemia and other malignant diseases caused by the depleted uranium-coated bombs that were dropped on my country.

In 2,300 air strikes throughout Serbia, 148 residential buildings and 62 bridges were destroyed, while 300 schools, hospitals and other public buildings were damaged, as were 176 cultural heritage sites. One third of the country's electrical capacity was destroyed, as were two major oil refineries.

According to studies conducted by economists, the direct damage to my nation's economy has been pegged at around 30 billion dollars. The indirect damage was much greater. We were collectively accused and then collectively bombed, as it was then claimed, for the *expulsion* of 800,000 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija. A result of this tragic war that produced an awful catalogue of casualties amongst the sides—whose end was marked by the establishment of an international administration—was the exodus of more than 200,000 ethnic Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks, and other non-Albanians from the province. In Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report, one sees the sad constatation that even today, ten years later, these IDPs cannot return to their homes.

I would like to underline one further counter-intuitive fact. The Serbs were punished ten years ago with bombs. But ten years later, in the wake of the mass expulsion of Serbs and the firestorms against their homes and holy sites, the Kosovo Albanians have been rewarded by the recognition of their illegal declaration of independence by more than 50 countries.

As the lesson for Serbia of the tragic military campaign of 1999 is that never again should a situation be created in which its citizens are punished and killed, so the lesson for the international community must be that innocent civilians should never pay with their lives the check of a wrongful policy.

The Republic of Serbia condemns every war crime as a matter of principle, and affirms that all accused must be brought to face justice. Our principled position is that every indictee is an individual with a particular name and surname, and that the doctrine of collective responsibility of nations or states cannot legitimately exist. The recent decisions by the Hague Tribunal against particular individuals in the Kosovo case—four former officials of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and one Serbian official—demonstrates that the state's collective responsibility, or that of its citizens, does not exist. It is possible to debate whether the

sentences were too harsh, especially in light of the not-guilty verdict handed down in the case of a leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army and former prime minister of the Kosovo PISG, Ramoush Haradinaj—I note that, according to the ICTY's then-Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, witnesses were not only intimidated but even physically liquidated. However that may be, one thing is certain: specific individuals were convicted for specific crimes, once more removing any possibility of anathemizing an entire nation.

This is precisely the reason why Serbia will continue to fully cooperate with the Hague Tribunal, and why we will keep doing everything in our power to arrest and bring before the Court the remaining two at-large ICTY indictees, Goran Hadzic and Ratko Mladic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia today—nine years after the fall of Milosevic—is a modern European democracy that poses a threat to no one. The country of which I am president has repeated time and again that joining the European Union is its most important strategic goal. By pursuing such a policy, Serbia has ensured that it remains one of the crucial factors of stability in the region. We will continue to be dedicated—as a matter of principle—to resolving outstanding problems exclusively through dialogue, peacefully, and without recourse to the force of arms.

The attempt at secession by the ethnic-Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija that took place on February 17th, 2008—nine years after the bombing of Serbia—stands in direct violation of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Pristina's unilateral and illegal declaration of independence represents an attempt to forcibly partition a member-State of the United Nations against its will and without the consent of the Security Council. Unfortunately, this was supported by a certain number of countries, primarily because there existed a constant threat of violence if Kosovo's ethnic Albanian community's secessionist demands were not met.

Even today, the Serbs in Kosovo have no security, no freedom of movement, no rule of law, no electricity, and no water. In short, respect of basic civilizational norms are denied to them. That is why I would like to underline my disagreement with the optimistic views expressed in the report before us today on these issues. Its claims cannot be substantiated in light of the reality on the ground.

The aggression committed against the Serbian residents of the village of Silovo is a case in point. For weeks without power in the middle of winter because of the condition set by Pristina authorities to sign written contracts that would have as a consequence for them the indirect recognition of the illegal construct known as the "Republic of Kosovo," is yet another example of the great amount of pressure to which are being subjected the Kosovo Serbs—the most endangered community in all of civilized Europe.

Let us be reminded that during the March 2004 pogrom, more than 50,000 ethnic Albanian extremists participated in an organized campaign of violence in which 19 were killed, 950 injured, and more than 4,000 Serbs were expelled from their homes. Additionally, more than 900 buildings were destroyed, and 35 Christian churches and monasteries were set ablaze, mined or otherwise destroyed. Many of these dated back to the 14th and 16th centuries.

Five years later, not a single individual remains behind bars for the organized burning down of a church in Kosovo. That is why I have called on UNMIK and EULEX to take the measures that need to be taken in order to ensure that justice can be served to every resident of Kosovo and Metohija, irrespective of ethnicity or religious affiliation. Every crime—especially hate crimes—must be thoroughly investigated and processed. Those accused must be tried before a just and passionless court.

We expect the UN's and EU's peacekeeping missions to establish the rule of law and provide the pre-conditions for a peaceful life in the province, instead of releasing perpetrators back out onto the street.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will list a few of the attacks on Kosovo Serbs that have taken place in the past month.

Two houses in which returnees to the village of Drsnik near Klina lived were burned to the ground on March 14th. The same day, shots were fired at the home of Dragoljub Budzevic in the village of Ljug, near Istok. Mr. Budzevic has returned to his village in Kosovo three years ago, together with 45 other Serbs. Before their return, they had lived as IDPs in other parts of Serbia since their expulsion in the summer of 1999. And in another part of Kosovo, the village of Silovo, 14 Kosovo Serbs were injured due to the excessive use of force by ethnic-Albanian police, in the course of peaceful demonstrations meant to draw attention to the fact that their electricity had been provocatively turned off.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is obvious to everyone today that—13 months after the illegal unilateral declaration of independence—Kosovo is no state.

The protection of human rights is minimal—demonstrated by the fact that the number of Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanian IDP returnees to the province is infinitesimally small.

Serbia, together with a number of European Union member-states, faces tremendous problems arising out of the activities of the ethnic-Albanian mafia in Kosovo, which specializes in the trafficking of narcotics, human beings, and weapons.

We want to see life return to normal in our southern province. We want to see a restoration of peace and security to all the residents of Kosovo and Metohija. I am convinced that both Albanians and Serbs can live side by side and with each other without fear, and without violence. That is why the UN and EULEX have to work hard to discharge their mandate in full.

In this place and on this occasion, I would like to underline that it is of exceptional importance for UNMIK and EULEX to ensure the freedom of movement throughout Kosovo for the democratically chosen officials of the Republic of Serbia. They must not be turned back at the administrative boundary line by the Pristina authorities. Such provocations can only serve to deeply distress the Serbian population of the province.

Excellencies,

The Kosovo case, as we all know, finds itself before the International Court of Justice. The UN's principal judicial organ will provide an advisory opinion to the following question: "Is the unilateral declaration of independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo in accordance with international law?"

I believe that all UN member States should respect the fact that the International Court of Justice will decide the issue and that no one should in any way pre-judge its deliberations. We therefore expect further recognitions not to be encouraged. I call on all UN member States which have not recognized UDI to stay the course while the Court conducts its work.

The Republic of Serbia supports new negotiations on Kosovo's future status. This is the only way to find a just, compromise and mutually-acceptable solution. Serbia will never recognize the independence of Kosovo, either directly or indirectly. And we will continue in the diplomatic, legal and peaceful defense of our integrity.

We are persuaded that the ICJ's advisory opinion will be immensely useful for the international system in its entirety, because we believe that its answer to the question posed by the General Assembly will prevent the Kosovo issue from serving as a deeply dangerous precedent in any part of the globe where secessionist ambitions are harbored.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia will remain a good-faith partner to the international community in the interim administration of our southern province. The role of the European Union is of great significance in the building up of much-needed institutional and societal fabric of Kosovo and Metohija. .

Now—as a result of the fact that Security Council has welcomed the November 2008 report of the Secretary-General in which EULEX's mandate is clearly defined as fully respecting resolution 1244 (1999), and operating in a strictly status-neutral manner under the overall authority of the United Nations—our cooperative partnership with EULEX and UNMIK should continue in order to implement the provisions of the November report, namely the six points which provide for the continuation of the Dialogue with Belgrade.

Serbia has and will continue to contribute constructively and seriously to finding mechanisms to fully implement the six points, in the context of the negotiating process. We have made concrete proposals on the issues of judiciary and the safeguarding of Serbian patrimony in Kosovo. We remain open to further talks on all levels with UN representatives, supported by EULEX, with the aim of implementing the six points—in line with resolution 1244 (1999) and in conformity with international law.

What has always been a crucial condition for our acceptance of reconfiguration was a clear and binding commitment by the European Union—confirmed in the Security Council—to be fully status neutral, and completely anchor its presence in Kosovo under the authority of the United Nations, in conformity with the full respect of resolution 1244 (1999).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased that these reasonable conditions have been met. The precisely formulated text of the November 2008 report welcomed by the Security Council and reaffirmed in the report we have before us today, defines the status neutrality of EULEX's engagement, which is a guarantee that no part of its mandate can be devoted to the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan for Kosovo's independence—rejected by the Republic of Serbia, and "not endorsed by the Security Council," in the words of the previous report.

What is of great significance is that the implementation of the six points—as well as the full deployment of EULEX—shall be put into operation notwithstanding the existence of some problems. And that it shall be done in consultation with all relevant stakeholders—most importantly and indispensably, the Republic of Serbia.

I call on the authorities in Pristina neither to obstruct the will of the international community, nor to oppose the binding resolve of the Security Council. The Republic of Serbia is ready to continue to cooperate with EULEX in our southern province. Because it has been confirmed by the United Nations, EULEX is welcome in Kosovo and Metohija.

I would like to repeat that it is of great significance for us that UNMIK continues its mission and mandate, that it remains fully and ably present on the ground throughout Kosovo, and that its budget not be reduced. Without UNMIK, it would be neither possible to fulfill the requirements of resolution 1244 (1999), nor Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's six points. I would like to underscore the duty of UNMIK to be a part of the Pristina delegation at all international and regional meetings, where it must be identified and heard under the name "UNMIK/Kosovo."

Let there be no doubt that Serbia will fully cooperate with UNMIK and EULEX, and that we will continue to contribute to the establishment of stability in our southern province.

I conclude by quoting from the Secretary-General's report: UNMIK must "continue to play a crucial role in maintaining peace and stability on the ground." Serbia will remain a factor of peace and stability, a partner to the international community in the quest to find a sustainable solution, and a country that has its future in the European Union.