

MILO ĐUKANOVIĆ, PRIME MINISTER OF MONTENEGRO

Speech at the opening of 2BS Forum

Budva, 5 June 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,
Your excellences
Honoured guests

It is my pleasure to greet you on behalf of the Government of Montenegro under whose auspice this Forum is organized and to wish you a warm welcome to Montenegro and to Budva.

The number and level of participants and officials from our region, from Europe and from America, show that in the last five years the 2BS Forum has become an important address for discussions about security in this part of Europe. It also confirms that our neighbours and partners appreciate Montenegrin contribution to regional stability and understand and support our progress and our plans in the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. I am certain that the discussions about a wide range of topics in the field of national, regional, European, Euro-Atlantic, therefore also global security will make this year's Forum very topical. It's timing, on its fifth anniversary, makes it even more interesting and more significant. For Montenegro, this year is a year of great hopes since we are expecting the invitation to join NATO by the end of December.

When we talk about security today we are talking about numerous well-known challenges, but also about new phenomena. None of us is isolated or immune to the internal and external threats, be in form Daesh, foreign fighters, new conflicts in the European continent in Ukraine, or adverse consequences of the Arab Spring in the European Southern neighbourhood. This is particularly true for the Western Balkans. Not only does our region feel these threats and their consequences, but it also faces the unfinished processes that continuously smoulder and come to the surface from time to time. We could all see what that looks like only recently in Macedonia. Everything that happens in the field of security in one country in the region has direct and indirect consequences for all of us. These threats are a warning never to relax when it comes to security in the Balkans. We know how tragic are the lessons we learnt from our history. We still vividly remember those from the nineties. Security threats, wherever they come from and whatever from they assume, are our shared problem. We are increasingly aware that we can solve them only by joining our efforts. It must be done through cooperation and exchange of information and experience, but primarily through protection mechanisms and organizations. This is the best way to come closer to the ideal of absolute security and to pool resources to this end, so that we do not have to face any threat alone. Such a framework is provided primarily by NATO, but also by the EU, the UN and the OSCE, each in its own way.

And where does Montenegro stand in this context? It is where it wishes and has to be - on its irreversible course towards full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. It is on the doorstep of NATO and far advanced in its negotiations with the EU. Countries in our region, particularly the small ones like Montenegro, can have a secure future only in European and Euro-Atlantic family. That is the right way to achieve economic progress and prosperity in the society and the only guarantee that the mistakes and conflicts from near and distant past will not be repeated. I consider this to be the most important legacy that the responsible political elites in the region should leave to future generations.

We want to adopt standards and values that the most prosperous part of the humanity is based on and that underpin in the foundation of both the EU and NATO. We do belong to that civilization circle both historically and geographically. We are aware that the path is long and difficult. But we do believe in ourselves and we are convinced that we will manage to conquer it. One cannot live on the past, no matter how glorious, and particularly not on the romanticized history and illusions. The idea of being neutral in today's world, and particularly in the Balkans, is nothing but an illusion. That concept, that some are trying to impose in Montenegro as well under the guise of pacifism, has only one goal - to divert us from our path towards the EU and NATO. It is impossible to become a part of NATO or the EU only partially. If you want to be a part of a community, it means you have to share the values it was created and through which it is being developed.

We want to be a part of Europe. We want to build a society based on democracy and the rule of law; a society of respect for human rights and freedoms, and a market economy. We want to share common security, to respect and protect territorial integrity and sovereignty... There is and there cannot be any compromise about these principles. No one can be "neutral" towards these values. There is no selective offer, there is no security served buffet-style so everyone can pick what they like. Montenegro has chosen the path towards the EU and NATO. That means it has chosen to promote and share their values - be it in meeting the criteria and achieving the standards for the EU membership, alignment with its foreign and security policy, or in fulfilling the conditions for NATO membership. We are aware that these processes are complex and that the criteria are strict and demanding and that they cannot be achieved painlessly or overnight. But the belief in what the membership in those communities brings to our citizens, our society and our country, as well as to the region we live in, and our devotion to the values we share gives us the strength to persist.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You are all aware that Montenegro is the most serious aspirant for NATO membership and that the decision on its invitation will be made in December this year. That decision has historical, civilizational and destiny-determining significance for our country. It will undoubtedly be the most significant decision since the one to restore our independence. It will encourage us to commit ourselves even more seriously to the reforms in the European integration process. In the last couple of years, Montenegro has been working hard on meeting its obligations in the key areas for NATO membership. This resulted in the Wales Summit decision to make a precedent and to decide for the first time on the invitation for a country between the two summits. We believe this very fact to be an important acknowledgement of our efforts. At the same time it is

an additional motivation for us to intensify reforms. And it is with pleasure that I can say that the progress we have achieved has already been positively assessed. In the defense and security sector we have practically met all the requirements for membership. Of course, it does not mean that we will stop there, since these are processes that have to continue. As a future NATO member, fully dedicated to its values, Montenegro will continue working on improving its human resources and investing additionally in the modernization of its army in the long term.

We are already thinking of the day when we will become a fully-fledged member and we want to be fully prepared for the obligations stemming from the membership. We have made great progress in the field of the rule of law, in the key chapters 23 and 24. The obligations that we have in this field are compatible for both integration processes. We believe that the election of the Special State Prosecutor that is soon to be finished, as well as the establishment of the Special State Prosecution Office along with the police unit to support it, will soon produce results and show that we have met the expectations of the Alliance also in this area. Of course, we will not stop there either, both because of the continuation of the reforms in the EU integration process but also for our own sake, since the rule of law and strong and efficient institutions form the basis for every stable and democratic state and its development.

I am convinced our citizens will continuously show increasing support to NATO membership of Montenegro. After all, they have already given two thirds majority support for this to the political parties represented in the Parliament. They know well to make distinction between the truth and misconceptions, between the facts and prejudice. Montenegrin society is mature enough to judge rationally and not emotionally about such important decisions on its historical turning points. Anything else would be returning to the past not choosing a better future. The majority support of our citizens for our NATO membership is important to us as an indicator that our people understand the importance of the membership for the future of Montenegro and not only as a way to meet the obligation that will be considered in the process of deciding on our invitation to join the Alliance. It is important that our citizens understand that it this decision is of paramount importance for the stability of our country and our economic prosperity. For the same reasons, it is equally important for the Western Balkans. The importance of the membership of Montenegro to NATO largely exceeds its size and capacities.

I believe that on the example of Montenegro the Alliance will show not only that it recognizes the individual merits of the aspiring countries, but also that it is consistent in keeping its open door policy alive and credible. NATO will also show that it remains dedicated to the security and stability of the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean. That is equally important for all of us in the region as it is for NATO itself. Without the full integration of the region into European and Euro-Atlantic structures the security picture of Europe would remain unfinished. The vision of Europe whole, free and at peace has brought about the longest period of its prosperity. This vision will be fully achieved only after all of us in the region are integrated. Until then, the Balkans will remain "unfinished business" for NATO and the EU. I believe that the expected invitation for Montenegro to join NATO is an important step for the continuity of this process and another confirmation of the vision of Europe we all desire.

As we are approaching the December decision we will continue our dynamic reforms. We believe that the forthcoming visit of the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to

Montenegro and the visit of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) before the end of the year, will provide an additional momentum to our efforts. That will also stimulate the curiosity of our citizens to learn more and better understand NATO and its indispensable role in the security architecture of Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area, which Montenegro also belongs to. This is the base for long-term security and economic progress, for preventing conflicts, for stability and unchangeability of borders, for a better future and a better life for the generations to come. There are no other NATO bases in Montenegro that the opponents of the Alliance are trying to use to provoke fear in our citizens.

Dear guests,

Many topics that you will discuss in the following days, that I only briefly tackled, provide an opportunity to define the response to the modern security challenges. Events such as this present a chance to exchange opinions about what we can do to face them successfully both individually and collectively, as well as how to best adapt to the new security context. As a partner that already behaves as an Ally, be it with our long-term contribution to the security of Afghanistan, our activities within the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, or with aligning with positions and policies of the EU and NATO on the crisis in Ukraine, Montenegro stands ready and open to further contribute to the global security. We will remain a reliable and credible partner to international community in facing the security challenges in the region and beyond, wherever the need might arise.

I wish you successful and productive work as well as a pleasant stay in Montenegro. I hope to welcome you next year for this Forum as a country that has gotten the invitation and is deep in preparation for its membership in the Alliance.

Thank you for your attention.