

Yugoslavia 1999: For the Sake of the Future. NATO Crime against Peace and Humanity

Speech at the Round Table “NATO Aggression – 24 years on”, held on March 23, 2023, held in the House of the Serbian Armed Forces

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There has been almost a quarter of a century since NATO aggression on Serbia and Montenegro (the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). During the aggression, some 4,000 of our fellow citizens were killed and twice as many injured. Three quarters of casualties were civilians, among them sadly a large number of children, from Milica Rakić, a toddler from Batajnica, to Sanja Milenković Serbia’s high school champion in mathematics from Varvarin. It will hardly ever be precisely determined how many more victims succumbed to delayed effects of weapons filled with depleted uranium, toxic chemical agents, or unexploded cluster bombs. It is for all of them why we have gathered as we are getting together, today it is here, as is each and every year throughout the country, across Europe and other continents, wherever there is one of us. We pay tribute and dedicate our thoughts and prayers to them, all the fallen heroes of our defense, all the innocent victims.

Serbia has not recovered yet from the pain and injustice, either spiritually or materially. In the very heart of Belgrade, we are still passing by the destroyed buildings whose gaping ruins make a lasting reminder of the deeds of our partners. As we praise donations they make, we still refrain from filing the announced but forgotten claims for war damages. It is hard to estimate to which extent this reflects our desire to be constructive, realistic, and respected. It might be a good idea to have the ruined structures of the Military General Staff and the Police declared and protected as monuments of culture, not merely because this would require less funds, but rather because it would make more sense that either their reconstruction or erection of brand-new edifices.

It was a crime against peace and humanity, against a country which posed no threat to anyone, the least of all to NATO or its members. Today, we are warning, not just repeating the truth, when we say that NATO aggression was carried out in violation of the fundamental

principles of international affairs, the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, and the Paris Charter; when we say that, five and a half decades since the end of World War Two, NATO reintroduced the war on European soil; that bombs and cruise missiles killed citizens of Serbia but were nonetheless intended for others as well; that, while raining down, they also dismantled the European and global architecture of security and cooperation; that, in its essence, it was a war against Europe waged by Europe itself; that it served as a case precedent for the ensuing wars of conquest and coups within the proclaimed strategy of Eastward expansion and a deceptive democratization; that NATO, by virtue of its aggression against Serbia and Montenegro (the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) marked its 50th anniversary by transitioning from a defensive and a regional into an invading alliance with global hegemonistic goals.

What prompts us to reiterate the above now, 24 years on, has in the least to do with habits, rituals or being stuck in the past, since we do it exclusively for the sake of the present and the future. For the sake of peace, security and progress as equal and unalienable values shared by all peoples and countries.

We also do this because the recent messages and views from Brussels, Ohrid, Washington and some other destinations warn us that the aggression against Serbia continues, albeit with other means but nonetheless with the same goal: to disenfranchise and humiliate the entire Serbian people in the Balkans and make them permanently shift away from their traditional friends and their support, and to renounce their statehood rights to the Province of Kosovo and Metohija. The past 24 years and the contemporary developments reconfirm, time and again, that the true goal of the aggression was to carve Kosovo and Metohija out from Serbia, together with overthrowing President Slobodan Milošević and, ultimately, transforming the Balkans into a springboard for warpath against the East.

Having in mind all past experiences and trends that brought about profound changes in global relations, **I am convinced that the best path forward for Serbia is to reaffirm an independent, neutral and well-balanced foreign policy**, to preserve and strengthen relations with traditional friends and allies, and to remain open for equal-footed relations and cooperation with all countries and integrations that endorse Serbia as an equal partner. Any just and durable solution for the province of Kosovo and Metohija is only possible with the consistent observance of the Constitution of Serbia, the fundamental principles of international law, and UN Security Council Resolution 1244 in its capacity of a permanent and irrevocable legal duty. This is the only solution capable of serving the interests of lasting peace, security, and cooperation. Any other status imposed by force, threats and/or extortion, regardless of the form it assumes, cannot transform into a right or compromise, nor can it evolve into contribution to peace. Quite the contrary.

If I may suggest that we send three pleas from this gathering:

First, to resume the work of the Parliamentary Committee for Establishing Consequences of the Use of Weapons Filled with Depleted Uranium during NATO Aggression, and then related Governmental Interdepartmental Body;

Second, that the work on compiling the list of all civilian victims of the aggression is completed before next March's 25th anniversary of NATO aggression;

And third, to analyze how has NATO aggression been portrayed and processed in relevant teaching units in textbooks at all levels of education, so to ensure the preservation of truth.

I assume there is no need to further elaborate these suggestion.

Thank you!

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