



***Statement of H.E. Mr. Edi Rama
Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania
at the General Debate 76th Session of the UN
General Assembly***

***New York
24 September 2021***

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Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished delegates,

It is an immense pleasure to return, physically, in this Great House of Peace, and be able to share our thoughts on the today's world, including my country's efforts and contribution in facing the biggest challenge of our time, the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, which, for more that 18 months, has put the world on its knees, has inflicted terrible pain and caused untold suffering everywhere.

Like every other corner of the world, Albania has suffered from this devastating scourge. From the very early days, we have followed all the recommendations of the World Health Organization; we have continuously and carefully implemented specific sanitary protocols in accordance with risk scenarios and the evolution of the situation; we have collaborated with our neighbours in exchanging information and data, including on updated protocols of treatment and we will continue to do so. To this day, half of the Albanian population is vaccinated and we expect to have the whole recommended population fully vaccinated during the next 10 months.

Excellences,

One of the big lessons of this tragedy is that no country can face it alone; and we know now, no one will be safe until everyone is. As we have seen far too often, without cooperation, solidarity and joint actions, the price we pay, individually and collectively, will only be higher. This is why at the very heist of Covid crisis last year, dozens of Albanian doctors and nurses went to Italy to help their colleagues in the

Lombardy region; in return, we have been happy and grateful to welcome Italian Doctors assist us in the same fight home.

Let's not forget: we will be able to prevail only through a common approach based on deeper solidarity, continued assistance, and uninterrupted cooperation. The sharp inequality to vaccine access – the only way to stop the virus - has once more highlighted the urgency for a different approach, for global leadership, inclusiveness, solidarity and fairness as well as trust to science.

This is why we have and continue to advocate in favour of enhanced international cooperation, and in this respect, we support the proposal for a new international treaty for pandemic preparedness and response: we must be and stay together, resist to any temptation of isolationism and nationalism. The virus knows no borders, doesn't stop at walls and is indifferent to nationalities. There is absolute urgency to radically improve vaccine access to all, as unvaccinated people carry the high risk to allow the emergence of more dangerous and deadly variants that could reverse the gains so painfully made, and expose us all to even more dire consequences. If the 75 years long and strong experience of the UN has taught us anything, it is that challenges to peace, development, prosperity, health and security need the contribution of all, rich and poor, big and small.

Mr. President,

We firmly believe that, 75 years after its founding, the United Nations remain the cornerstone of the multilateral rule-based world order. With dialogue and concerted efforts through the entire UN System, humanity has made remarkable

gains in peace, security and development, in the respect of human rights and human dignity; in empowering women and motivating youth, in helping hundreds of millions of people get out of poverty. We must continue to build on these achievements. The people, our citizens, are right to ask for more, for better and faster, and we must be up to task.

Dear colleagues,

Let's remind ourselves that the way we react and interact will determine our future. Today, multilateralism is challenged when we know far too well where reclusion and nationalism has led the world more than once. Multilateralism can be slow, sometimes frustrating and it does not always produce quick results. But even for a second, a world without rules, obligations and multilateral institutions, is simply unimaginable. Therefore, we cannot afford to lose faith in the multilateral system. We must work to reform it; not undermine it, not abandon it.

We share UN Secretary General's concerns in his report on "Our Common Agenda", and we think that all UN member states have the responsibility to commonly contribute to increasing the functionality of multilateral institutions and mechanisms in order to make a tangible difference to people's lives.

It is exactly in this spirit that Albania successfully chaired the OSCE in 2020, as part of its continued engagement and efforts to strengthen peace, human rights, cooperation and equality in the OSCE area. The Ministerial Council of Tirana agreed on several new commitments on combatting transnational organized crime, countering corruption and preventing torture in the OSCE region.

It is with the same faith in multilateral institutions and with an unwavering commitment to international peace and security, that Albania is joining the Security Council of the United Nations, as a non-permanent member, for the term 2022-2023. I take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank all UN member States for their overwhelming support and their trust. Albania will be a responsible, reliable and open member of the Council.

Albania will bring to the Security Council the perspective and contribution of a small but active country, with a predictable constructive foreign policy vis a vis its neighbours, the region the wider Europe and beyond, with a large and strong network of partners, with no conflicts with any of the members of the international community, and, let me repeat it, with a consistent faithful commitment to multilateralism. Albania will bring its desire and true commitment for cooperation and dialogue, friendship and respect, as a best drive towards a better world, a better life for all.

We will also bring with us a long and rich history of exemplary tolerance, openness to other cultures and nations, respect for differences. Whoever is seeking for a best practice in placing respect for the different other at the heart of social cohesion that stands solid against intolerance and any form of extremism, may turn to Albania's example.

As a confirmed active contributor to international security, we will sit in the Security Council with a clear agenda of priorities. They reflect what modern Albania stands for and range from the promotion of peace and security, peaceful conflict

resolution and mediation; the respect for the rule of law and the human rights for all; increased participation of women and youth in conflict prevention and resolution; universal adherence and full implementation of all non-proliferation and disarmament treaties and conventions; concrete and continued active committed to the fight against international terrorism, violent extremism.

Mr. President,

Climate Change is another key priority in our national agenda. We do not need to have repeated extreme weather events, catastrophic flooding and unbearable heat waves, to understand that the continued loss of biodiversity and the unsustainable use and degradation of ecosystems are causing profound and adverse consequences to millions of people and threaten peace and security.

Convinced of the urgency to curb greenhouse gas emissions in line with Paris agreement and the 2030 Agenda, as of July 2019, the Government of Albania is the first country in the Region with an endorsed Strategy on Climate Change and related Action Plans, with policy objectives and concrete actions to reduce greenhouse emissions. A special law on “Climate Change” has been adopted on December 2020. Further, in support of the objectives of the European Union Green Deal, Albania and other Western Balkan countries signed two Declarations in November 2020: the Western Balkan countries on the Green Agenda, as well as the creation of a Common Regional Market, which aim at making the economy sustainable and climate-neutral by 2050. Albania is actively engaged in doing its part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% in the next decade, and to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European integration process represents an anchor for Albania's future and we look forward to the first Intergovernmental Conference in accordance with the decision of the EU Council in March 2020 to open accession negotiations with Albania. I have said in Tirana, in Brussels and I want to repeat it here: Albania is ready; we are waiting for the EU to do its part.

EU integration is a national priority goal; it is a region-wide aspiration and inspiration. In a totally and positively transformed regional context, all six Western Balkan Countries have agreed to enhance economic cooperation by developing a Common Regional Market, based on the EU rules and standards. We have entered a new and ambitious phase of co-operation and are working to concretely implement the 4 EU fundamental freedoms: freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital, known as, as "Open Balkans". It is the mark and proof of our regional ownership, convinced that it will generate economic growth, reduce unemployment, increase trade, investment and employment in the Western Balkan.

Excellences,

The history of the United Nations is one of uninterrupted enlargement. It started with 50 members in San Francisco and we are now 193. But still this large Assembly

is not and will not be complete without one of the States of our region, the Republic of Kosovo.

You have heard me more than once here call for the recognition of the independence of Kosovo. It is not an obsession nor is it something just to be mentioned; it is an invitation to acknowledge the new realities in the Balkans. I want to reiterate this call and do so because reality has shown, to us, to the Kosovars, to the Serbs, to all Europeans and to everyone anywhere who wants to see it, that an independent Kosovo – a reality already 13-years-strong - has brought peace and stability in the region, has helped move ahead from the bitter past, and is helping us all implement a common roadmap to our common future.

In our view, there is no alternative to dialogue which should lead to mutual recognition between two States, two neighbours. Every day without such an agreement is a day lost, a day stolen to the youth in both countries, a day taken off the common future. I say it in a friendly way but with absolute conviction: only wisdom, courage and vision will finally liberate Serbia from the burden of its past.

Distinguished delegates,

Before concluding, let me say a few words on Afghanistan and the worsening dramatic situation under the Taliban rule.

It is our duty to do whatever possible not to abandon the Afghans who find themselves once more in the cross-roads; to preserve the undeniable

achievements of the last two decades, prevent and resist to any return to the age of darkness we have seen before.

As the dramatic events were unfolding in front of our eyes, we could not stand idle. Despite limited capacities for receiving immigrants, but with a big heart, just as we have done in other critical moments of our history in saving the Jews during the Holocaust, welcoming half a million of our Kosovo brothers in 1999, we have opened our doors and hearts to receive several thousand Afghan refugees.

We owe this to our moral constitution, to our duty to be in solidarity with those in danger in support of dignity and human life.

As the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, the Albanian Saint Mother Teresa once said: "Even when you cannot do great things, do small things every day, but with great love."

We are humbly doing our part.

Thank you !