



President of the Republic of Slovenia

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
to the Albanian Parliament,**

Tirana, 23. 5. 2024

Dear President Bajram Begaj,

Dear Speaker of the Parliament Lindita Nikolla,

Dear Members of the Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot help but notice that more than 35 per cent of members in your Parliament are women. The women represent more than 38 per cent in the Slovenian Parliament. The Speaker of your Parliament is a woman. And so it is in Slovenia. Women are highly represented in the Government. And so they are in Slovenia. I am very pleased that not merely in theory, but also in practice we are sending to the world an important message: only together is it possible to build successful societies and countries.

I am exceptionally honoured, Dear Speaker of the Parliament, that you have invited me to speak before this distinguished Assembly. The world in which we live is full of challenges. It unfortunately involves also those that shake the foundations of the norms and values in which we were brought up and which we strive to have our children enjoy as well. Violence and not peace is gradually finding its way into the international community. We were all shocked to hear about the attempted assassination of the Slovakian Prime Minister Fico. My good friend and distinguished politician Zuzana Čaputová, who is leaving the office of the President of the Slovak Republic, said – and I agree with her – that it was not only the politician who was attacked, but democracy as a way of life was also attacked. To this end, such incidents must be understood from a broader perspective. They are part of alarming changes in the international community with unforeseen consequences for everything that defines the civilised world.

What defines us, who we are and what we must strive for are three ideals: in addition to democracy, there is also the preservation of freedom and human dignity. Without these, there is no life worth living. In this context, the international community is at the crossroads between good and evil. “Good” in the international community denotes cooperation, division of labour, mutual respect and inclusion. While “evil” means a blind pursuit of one’s own objectives disregarding others and irrespective of the means used to attain such objectives.

Dear Members of the Parliament, evil must be opposed. We live in a time of severe global crises, such as climate change, unclear relationships between superpowers, growing development disparities, including complex regional issues, such as the development direction of the European Union. There is only one way to tackle these challenges in order to preserve the norms and values I spoke about earlier. In sports jargon, it is called teamwork. Multilateralism is the route to solving global problems. If we address them individually, we will not be able to avoid difficult questions or even threats to our sovereignty.

We must ask ourselves whether the emphasis on bilateralism, as a primary means of communication between countries, is the path towards progress. Small countries are vulnerable before a strong counterpart, but our voice is stronger within the framework of a multilateral forum. If anyone understands this, then it is Albania, due to your recent experience of Security Council membership. We must ask ourselves whether we will yield to the dictates of the countries that merely want to assert their interests at the expense of others. Will we yield to the countries which blatantly, even theatrically, shred the Charter of the United Nations on the podium and with their actions? Or, will we realise that such behavioural patterns are outdated, have proven inefficient in the past, and do not contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Unfortunately, we must still tackle the relics of reactionary behaviour. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is the example closest to us. The position of my country is clear: the Russian Federation has brutally trampled the entire post-war international order. The fact that a country bearing a special responsibility to maintain international peace and security wishes to take territory from a neighbouring country and possibly reshape its political orientation is reprehensible. The conditions in Ukraine are difficult. It seems that Russia is exploiting its current military superiority and has no intention to cease the aggression. Ukraine's allies are starting to think that it will not be possible to help Ukraine without a direct engagement with Russia. The military rhetoric is particularly loud in Europe nowadays, which worries the experienced diplomats. Some of them think – and I agree with them – that a peace incentive which would aid diplomacy is at this point equally important as new weapons for Ukraine. The higher the number of such initiatives, the less talk there will be about military resolution being the only solution for the conflict.

I think that the role of diplomacy in this conflict has not been sufficiently discussed. Several peace initiatives have already been presented. The forthcoming peace conference in Switzerland is a great step towards ending this European tragedy. Significant progress in the negotiations will only be made when the Russian Federation and Ukraine attend them and when Ukraine is an equal partner.

The leadership of the Russian Federation says that “the reality on the ground” must be considered as a starting point for negotiations. But the Russian authorities must be aware that that is not the only reality. The reality is also the fact that the Russian Federation is an aggressor state which is brutally violating the Charter of the United Nations and simultaneously abusing the provisions of the Charter for its own interests. The reality is also that any leniency shown towards the aggressor would provide encouragement to any other country in the world which likely harbours similar aggressive intentions. These starting points must be observed by all the parties in the conflict. The task of European and global

diplomacy is to achieve the foregoing with countries in conflict, which will be the best response to the increasingly influential military rhetoric on our continent.

This and other conflicts must end in court every time actions are carried out that raise the suspicion that crimes against humanity have been committed. This does not only apply to the war in Ukraine. But also for the atrocities carried out in Gaza by Israel and Hamas' terrorism and all other conflicts around the world, such as, for example, that in Sudan. As a lawyer and a human rights activist, I am particularly sensitive to this topic. We must insist that the killing ends here and now. We must insist that those allegedly responsible for crimes against humanity are severely punished if their guilt is proven, irrespective of the region or the country from which they come. If we fail to persist in this issue, then we must seriously ask ourselves what is the purpose of international court institutions. In this context, allow me to express sincere satisfaction that Albania decided to sign the Ljubljana–The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes at the beginning of this year.

Dear Members of the Parliament,

Back to Europe. You may ask yourselves: why such an emphasis on global topics if we live in Europe and have sufficient issues of our own? My response is clear: considering the nature of the challenges we face, we must rise above the framework of the usual, Eurocentric view of the world. Our prism must change. We have to be much more aware of the factors and circumstances that threaten us from the outside. If we succeed and do not underestimate these factors, then maybe we will realise that we not only live in Europe, but must also contribute greatly to upgrading the European Union to be the way it was envisioned by its founders: solid within and solid on the outside. In this way, we can become a credible and respected foreign policy actor. If we, the Europeans, want to have an actual impact on the developments in the world, we must convince our discussion partners time and again that behind the positions of "Brussels" stands half a billion people. Only one motto applies to us: united we stand, divided we fall.

The European elections will be an important indicator of the direction in which Europe wishes to go. At that time, the future dynamics of the European integration process will be more predictable, including with regard to the Western Balkans, in which we are particularly interested. At last year's Bled Strategic Forum, Charles Michel said that the EU and candidate countries should be prepared for enlargement by 2030. A lot of scepticism followed this statement in terms of whether all the candidate countries would be equal to the challenge. I would add that the European Union is also part of the problem: will member states rise to this challenge? In any case, it applies to all member states and non-member countries that the European Union without the Western Balkans is not the European Union. To this end, prompt membership of this region must be actively advocated.

And Slovenia is doing this. In our opinion, Albania meets the conditions for opening the first negotiation cluster. We believe that Albania can establish itself as an example of how to face the difficult challenges of meeting the accession conditions. Albania has to be allowed to show that it can be another bright spot in the history of the European integration process.

Dear President, Dear Speaker of the Parliament, Dear Members of the Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to end my address with a mention of bilateral relations. These are genuine, friendly and warm. Slovenia is looking forward to the day when it will be able to greet Albania among the member states of the European Union. On this journey, our countries can ensure that their cooperation grows even closer and that we exploit numerous potentials, particularly in the economic field. The trade between the countries is growing, but still very low, somewhat more than EUR 100 million. It is crucial that the business communities of both countries meet more frequently and establish closer links.

Both heads of state also participate in the Brdo-Brijuni Process. I am pleased that an important declaration was adopted last year after two years of decreased activity. In addition to the clearly defined European perspective, the declaration focuses specifically on two topics that unify the countries participating in the Process despite their political differences, i.e. environmental protection and the situation of young people. We anticipate the continuation of this discussion at the coming meeting in October. You can be certain that President Begaj and I will be active participants in the discussions.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Albania can be proud of its numerous exceptional individuals. Let me only highlight the great modest woman who left a powerful legacy and a message about the significance of good deeds, nobility and compassion; Mother Teresa. And I should also mention the monumental pen of Albanian literature, writer Ismail Kadare. Kadare once said about the region,

“We must prove that friendship between the Balkan nations is possible. It has become fashionable to immediately take the Balkans as a negative example when there are quarrels and divisions between nations. We must resist this and work together for a different image of the region. In doing so, we have to cooperate. We all live in the same house, on the Balkan Peninsula.”

Slovenia on the northern border of the Balkan Peninsula and Albania on the southern section of the region are partners and allies.

They are allies in the promotion of solidarity and commitment to the European idea and European values.

They are countries which cooperate and encourage others to do so. Because cooperation is stronger than incitement.

Thank you to the Speaker of the Parliament for the invitation and to you for your dedication to European values and the European idea. The idea of cooperation and solidarity.

Thank you to all who believe in Europe and its values and the mission of the UN.