

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA IGMAN INITIATIVE, BELGRADE, 27 JUNE 2005

Mr President of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro,
Mr Chairman and Members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Distinguished members of the Igman Initiative,
Dear guests and invitees,

One should thank the Igman Initiative - which was so many times in the past at the forefront with its actions and moves offering prospects and pushing forward in circumstances when everything seemed to pull backwards - for the fact that the heads of state of three countries of the so-called Dayton Triangle have met today in Belgrade. As far as I am concerned, I accepted the invitation gladly and readily because I sincerely believe that one should use any opportunity not only to exchange views but rather to advance relations among our three states.

I held the view and continue to do so that one of the priority tasks of Croatian foreign policy is full normalisation of circumstances in southeast Europe, to be more exact - in the area of the former Yugoslavia. The idea that Croatia should "flee" from the region and separate itself from its neighbours is erroneous and, allow me to say quite frankly, stupid too. Just the opposite - Croatia has to do everything it can in order for the region to become secure, stable and peaceful and for us to further our relations with the neighbouring countries not forgetting while doing so, our recent past or rather in spite of that past.

On the assumption that Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina co-operate in the realisation of such a concept, we can through our joint efforts help that our three countries make a successful progress towards a goal that is our identical one - towards a unified Europe. We can, so to speak, present to a unified Europe a gift of peace and stability in its southeastern part. This is not a minor thing.

I shall reiterate here something that I have already said on many occasions to date - our European path and everything it implies or rather assumes is not and cannot be a result of anybody's pressure from outside. Everything we have been doing in the context of adopting European standards and promoting European values is something that we have been doing and have to do for the sake of ourselves and our own future.

It is essential that our citizens realise this. I think that in this area too non-governmental organisations that were the true pioneers in blazing the trails towards the developed and democratic world, which means in accepting policy and practice of civil society and human rights, can do a lot. The awareness that our future does not consist of returning to the past or negating or being silent on the past but rather only and solely of accepting the truth about the past is one of the key prerequisites for making a stride through the European gate.

Equally so, the awareness that we unfortunately became the crisis spot of the Old Continent and "countries - cases" in the late 20th century as well as that we cannot base our existence or build our future on this ill-fated reputation must become one of the essential determinants when conceiving our approach towards the world and in the world. When I say "our" I refer both to each individual country and to the region. On behalf of the Republic of Croatia I can quite definitely say that we are not and do not wish to be a "special case" in any context or "a case" at all for that matter.

We are aware both of what the situation was before and what it is now. We know that there is still much to be done in order to heal the wounds, remove the scars and - what is most important - to change manner of thinking, remove stereotypes, undo mistrust and combat hatred. Let us not deceive ourselves - all of this still exists. For this very reason, it seems to me to be extremely important that the Igman Initiative at its Belgrade session will discuss the possibilities for advancing cultural co-operation in the Dayton triangle.

Often, there is a misconception that policy should be everywhere at the forefront. Sometimes, actually quite frequently, it is necessary to set the stage for political action in some other

fields. In our case, policy gave the initial impulse, initiating the process of normalisation, but now the long-term, lasting and true basis of this process is yet to be created – both in the economy, in culture, in science and in sports. It will not always be easy or simple. Incidents that not seldom accompany sports events bear eloquent testimony to it.

It will not be easy in culture either because – however paradoxical this may be – in the very ranks of cultural workers there was not a small number of those who, without exaggeration, can be called exponents of chauvinism and preachers of hate. They were active in literature, non-fiction, films ... We are now faced with the consequences of their "work". However, one should not have here any illusions either. They are still working. Sometimes, we still witness situations that doors are open such people while those who advocate dialogue, restoration of trust and understanding are viewed as national traitors or at best as "dubious faces".

Let us get this straight: I do not plead for any kind of prohibition, but I demand and I think I am entitled to demand at least equal chances. Frequently, there are none. Often, we are more inclined to accept the insistence on that which separates us, forgetting that there is much that links us together – not in terms of some joint life, but rather in terms of interests.

We are often quick and ready when it comes to calling others to account and denouncing "those others" but we are very slow and reluctant when it comes to turning to ourselves. Such a situation has to change. We simply have to be open and sincere – towards ourselves and then towards others. Of course, we expect, and rightfully so, such behaviour from those others as well.

The truth about the present implies the ability to identify common interests that are not seldom based on the common past too, the past preceding the wars during which the Yugoslav federation disintegrated. It implies readiness to recognise, identify and realise these interests as well as the readiness to overcome the burdens of the recent past that are still encumbering our relations – admittedly at the highest levels ever less so.

The truth about the past implies both apology, admission and repentance. In a court, be it an international or a national court, both accountability and guilt can and have to be ascertained exclusively on the individual basis. Nations are not guilty. The fact is, however, that crimes were committed in the name of nations and under the cloak of the name of entire nations. It is therefore logical that expressions of apology come in the name of nations or states. Those who express apologies should be received in good faith and not attacked or boycotted.

We are not accountable for evils and crimes of the past, be it distant or recent past, but we have to be ready to accept accountability so that such evils and such crimes do not happen again in the future. In the spirit of this accountability and demonstrating that we are not shunning it, we shall sign here today a joint statement that we entitled "Trilateral View on the Present and the Future". We have stated as much as this is necessary and possible at this moment. We have stated, I believe, enough in order to create a basis to make an additional step forward in the normalisation of our mutual relations.

The Igman Initiative that has recently submitted to us proposals for many bilateral agreements that should advance our mutual relations, ensures a framework both for our meeting today and for signing the trilateral statement. We are obliged to it. I hope that it will continue its valuable activities in the future as well, helping on the one hand citizens, and on the other – us on whom those citizens have conferred the highest offices. We, both the former and the latter, need that help in order to continue on our path towards Europe as quickly as possible and being as prepared as possible, mutually helping one another.

The truth is that present-day Europe is shaken but the concept of a united Europe has not come into question. It may be necessary to reconsider on the basis of which and what concept that integration is being implemented but – I reiterate – the integration as such is not challenged just the same as the policy of enlargement or in fact of rounding up the European Union is not questioned either. On this European path, Croatia has got ahead of others in the region but it is ready to share our experience and knowledge with Serbia and Montenegro and with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Finally, I would say that with today's trilateral statement we display and prove maturity for the future – not any future but rather European future. Let this be our message from this place to

those who would in our midst rather move us back into isolation and the state of mutual conflict, but also our message to Europe where there are a few who still have some doubts as to whether our place is also among their ranks.

We are on the good path.

We have to continue on this path, in spite of resistance, in spite of difficulties and in spite of doubts.

There is no other way for us.

Thank you.