



ADDRESS DELIVERED BY  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA  
H.E. TOMISLAV NIKOLIĆ  
AT THE INTERNATIONAL DONORS' CONFERENCE  
IN BRUSSELS  
16 JULY 2014

Dear Commissioners Mr. Fule and Mrs. Georgieva,  
Dear Prime Minister of Slovenia Mrs. Bratusek,  
Dear Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic Mr. Fabius,  
Excellencies,  
Dear participants at the Donors' Conference,  
People of good will,  
Friends,

I feel proud to be the President of Serbia, the country whose current, frank, sound and firm position here in Brussels has gathered its friends, even the ones engaged in mutual pointless, unnecessary, and very dangerous disputes.

I feel proud of the Serbian people, especially the young ones who have, without the aid of machines, with only their bodies, stopped the floods caused by incessant rain that went on for days and nights. I deeply sympathize, like all of you, with the families of those who have lost their loved ones, and with the homeless, some of whom are waiting to return to their homes, and other who have yet to find a new roof over their heads. I have had recurrent dreams of children's innocent eyes, filled with fear from the force that had thrown them into the water in the middle of the night, separating forever some of them from their parents, wondering whether the nightmare would ever end.

Nevertheless, I am a citizen of Serbia, my pain is a hereditary one, deriving from the bones of our ancestors.

Therefore I address you with gratitude, for you are here because something dreadful has happened to us, thousand miles apart, separated by oceans, history, civilizations.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart, may you never experience such a disaster, and may your good deeds be rewarded. Or, to quote a Latin proverb, dear friends, hope for the good, for you have done good...

I extend my gratitude to all the states which have come to our rescue at the nadir of our misfortune, thus minimizing the number of casualties and the extent of material damage.

We offer our gratitude to all of you, your states and peoples for being with us tonight, helping us to move on. We gather together on different occasions, the East and the West, the North and the South, and we part until the next meeting. Happiness assembles us all, but it is only suffering that truly unites us. Pain cannot be overcome by solitude. Thank you for assuring us that we are not alone.

On behalf of the people of Serbia, I extend my gratitude to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the understanding and support that our largest organization has provided to the idea of holding a donors' conference intended for alleviating the flood damage in three countries, according to the initial plan, and subsequently in two of them: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, because Croatia has informed us that it would take part in today's Conference, but would cover damage from other sources. During our suffering, our thoughts were with our likewise severely affected friends, as their thoughts were surely with us.

We were guided by a Serbian popular saying: "It is better to fence yourself with good neighbours than with a good fence".

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the European Union, and particularly to Slovenia, its Member State, for convening the donors' conference and for their hospitality.

I am most sincerely grateful to the President of France, Mr. Francois Hollande, who was the first to hear my elaborated idea of convening a donors' conference, on the occasion of my visit to Paris, on 22 May 2014, assessing it immediately as touching and justified, and who has right away, accepted that France be the patron of this wonderful gathering showing solidarity with the affected.

At the press conference, I addressed President Hollande with the words I would like to share with you. I quote:

“Who could we turn to if not to France? Our ancestors turned to her. When times were harsh for Serbia- France was there. Time flows, and life brings new challenges, problems, but those peoples who forget friendship do not deserve to exist. We shall not and cannot forget our friendships, we only forget hostilities. We thank France for its co-participation in everything that Serbia went through over the past week, for its selfless assistance in saving lives, and for its decision to accept and from now on to spearhead the initiative to host a large global gathering of countries aimed at collecting aid for the flood-stricken states.

We cannot compensate for all the damage through donations and aid, perhaps we will need to cover three quarters of it on our own, but everything one is granted in their hour of need, every gesture of appreciation, solidarity and assistance will last eternally. I would never ever want this to happen to you, but bear in mind that Serbia knows how to be grateful in return for friendship. Serbia will neither ask for any help, nor insist on whether it has the right to something or not. This is the time for solidarity, not for requests.” End of quote.

After all, solidarity, as one of the founding principles of the European Union as well, exists not only as a mere idea, or as an expressed political position, but precisely as a pragmatic action and aid, intended to rescue human lives.

Serbia will always remember what President Hollande told me, I quote:

"Your presence in France creates an opportunity for the appeal you have launched to be heard- the appeal to assist Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We can make a prompt decision on convening a donors' conference. At the time when there are so many afflicted in Serbia, we have to demonstrate how responsible and generous we are." End of quote.

This is why we have gathered here. For this reason the Serbs and other citizens of Serbia can freely say today that they have friends worldwide and that the feeling is indeed wonderful. It is much more beautiful than counting friends on the fingers of one hand.

Ivo Andrić, the Nobel Prize Laureate, wrote on behalf of all the Serbs:

"When it comes to the people who become close to us, we tend to forget all the details of the first encounter with them; it appears to us as if we have known them for as long as we can remember, and as if they have always been with us."

Dear friends, as of today, you have become our close friends.

In addition, I would particularly like to emphasize the efficient reaction of the United Nations and the UN agencies, which have made a key contribution towards the damage assessment. I would like to thank you for the prompt reaction and efforts invested into obtaining financial assistance from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the arrival of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team. The engagement of the UNDP, together with the EU and the World Bank was very important throughout the elaboration of the Post-Flood Damage Assessment Report. Moreover, I express my hope that the UNDP will continue to lend its support to Serbia after the damage assessment is completed.

I also give my credit to the Red Cross of Serbia, its cooperation with the Red Cross of other countries, and all the humanitarian organizations operating in Serbia, that are still helping the floods affected population.

Serbia received assistance from 14 countries - Germany, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Denmark, Romania (via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism), as well as from the Russian Federation, Belarus, Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia, and Montenegro (bilaterally). Humanitarian aid in food, water and equipment was delivered by the European Commission, OSCE, UN, World Food Programme, as well as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Great Britain, Israel, Japan, Romania, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, United Arab Emirates, Turkmenistan and many private donors. International teams tasked with flood-rescue operations and water pumping activities were deployed on the ground, when the need arose, aided by the coordination of local emergency management staffs, the Ministry of Interior's Sector for Emergency Situations and the Serbian Armed Forces. The courage demonstrated in saving people from the water torrents was amazing. Owing to the assistance of the international water pumping teams, the water level has dropped significantly in the area of the largest thermal power plant in Obrenovac, providing 60% of electric power, thus preventing damage of immense proportions. Water purification teams from Hungary, Germany, and France were engaged in the vicinity of Belgrade, Svilajnac and Čuprija, while the team from Germany is still operating in the area of Obrenovac.

I highly appreciate both the commitment and engagement of the EU officials, in particular the EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response

Kristalina Georgieva, who immediately after the floods visited the Republic of Serbia, and had talks with top Serbian officials, visited the most severely affected areas and delivered the necessary equipment for the urgent elimination of the flood consequences. The support was also provided by the EU Commissioner for Regional Development Johannes Hahn, who visited the Republic of Serbia and toured Obrenovac, the town most severely struck by the floods. The Presidents of Slovenia, Montenegro and Belarus also visited us. The Civil Protection Mechanism of the European Union was activated as well. Apart from the emergency measures, we expect that the EU will provide support through the EU Solidarity Fund, whereby Serbia will be treated as a Member State. We appreciate that the EU has offered its support to the Republic of Serbia through pre-accession funds as well, from the remaining funds of the previous budget years, which for various reasons have not been allocated, and can quickly be mobilized. We expect the final decision on the implementation of these funds.

Dear Friends,

Chronicle of the hardest natural disaster that has ever hit my country is frightening. In a moment, the whole life of people has disappeared. All they have created for decades, not infrequently through generations, diligently and so hard, turned into a wasteland in front of their eyes. From the perspective of a family who lost its home, kindergarten, school, job, street, memories, it seemed as if they have lost future as well. The Donors' Conference is the hope for every person in my country that the future in which they will rebuild their lives and prospects of their children exists. Transformed into a cold, but telling statistics, the consequences of water-related disaster look like this:

Floods struck Serbia after heavy rainfall and a strong cyclone which began on 13 May 2014. Obrenovac was hardest hit by the floods, and it was estimated that 90% of the town was flooded. The entire town of about 9000 residents was evacuated. The Nikola Tesla Thermal Power Plant, located near Obrenovac, produces nearly 60% of electricity in Serbia. It was not flooded because of well-performed interventions. The Thermal Power Plant Kostolac, which provides Serbia with 11% of electricity, was jeopardized by the overflow of the Mlava river. The water broke through two rings of sandbags, but failed to break the last line of defense which the people protected with their own bodies in the most jeopardized parts. The towns of Paraćin, Petrovac na Mlavi, Svilajnac, Smederevska Palanka, and a part of Varvarin were also flooded. In Krupanj, flash floods destroyed dozens of houses. What was not devastated by water was devastated by landslides. By 16 of May, 7,618 people were evacuated, 20 injured, while 24 people lost their lives.

It is not the first time that catastrophic floods have hit Serbia but never in its history have the effects been more destructive. It is obvious that the more one tries to rule over nature and use its potential, to overcome its whims, it strikes back with a force, which clearly shows that in the fraction of a second it can defeat man. Man is partly responsible for the occurrence of natural disasters, by deforestation, uncontrolled exploitation of mineral resources, urbanization, accumulation and construction of water dams. The race for the greater use of natural resources confronts us with a number of accidents.

On the other hand, the expansion of settlements, often built on landslides, riverbeds and without consideration to natural disasters, poses an additional risk. The floods which hit Serbia, besides destroying crops, houses, and other buildings, roads, industrial plants and facilities, resulted also in long-term consequences. If the crops stay long under water, not only

will they be destroyed in the current year, but also in the next year, because the erosion of the surface layer deteriorates the soil quality, thus converting arable land into infertile soil.

The water that entered into the production halls destroyed equipment, vast amounts of raw materials, semi-products and final products. This has already had a negative effect on the production which either decreased or stopped completely, and on socio-economic status of the people living in the flooded areas. During the floods, the supply of drinking water was difficult, and electricity was turned off until the complete rehabilitation of the terrain.

Although there was little investment in the flood prevention for many years, and what was already built was largely neglected, a series of measures prevented even greater damage and catastrophic consequences of the disaster which befell Serbia. The chain of command was simple and efficient, the security structures offered their assistance, provided evacuation, accommodation and returned people to their homes and helped in alleviating the consequences. Food, drinking water, medicines, clothing, toiletries were provided in sufficient quantities and delivered promptly.

We share the same planet. Today, Serbia has suffered, tomorrow who knows where and which country. Nature, however, is unpredictable. Every cloud has a silver lining. The world united in the desire to help is just one good aspect. This catastrophe brings the message to the whole world: it is essential that all of us together coordinate the activities aimed at mitigating the effects of natural disasters. It is necessary to develop, as urgently as possible, the system for climate change adaptation and establish the mechanisms for disaster risk reduction. It is necessary to act immediately.

If no measures are taken to limit the global temperature increase, there is a real danger that the extreme weather conditions caused by climate change will be even more intense in the future.

In this regard, the Republic of Serbia is essentially interested in the realization of the sustainable development goals in the formulation of which it is actively involved, as well as in reaching solutions and a consensus on climate change.

Friends,

For the Donors' Conference to be successful, teams of experts from Serbia and the EU have assessed the damage and have also estimated the flood risk for the purpose of its prevention.

The Flood risk assessment was determined on the basis of general natural geographic features, population, urbanization, natural movement of population, social and economic development, technical systems and infrastructure. The following has been specified: Waterways and reservoirs which may cause flooding, as well as hydro atmospheric conditions for the declaration of a natural disaster, functionality and the construction of flood control facilities with numerical indicators, the size of the affected area and the construction degree, an overview of possible man-made retention ponds and dams, sites critical for the formation of ice jams, flood and groundwater threatened areas and locations.

The Risk assessment contains the conclusions about where, and in which part, a disaster can be expected, its intensity, casualties, material damage, presence of objective conditions, in order to prevent the natural disaster and the forces and resources for mitigating the effects and alleviating the situation. The assessment is the result of joint work of professional bodies of

regular activities and civilian protection, as international experts in the field of terrible disasters.

Serbia needs assistance in repairing the damage and in creating conditions for enabling the application of preventive measures for flood protection. This primarily involves the construction of defensive lines – embankments or mobile dams on sites of possible floods, especially in reservoirs, anti-erosion works in basins, and along river beds, reforestation of the terrain and the construction of barriers for flash flood prevention, means for breaking icebergs for enabling a regular water flow, creating drainage to prevent flooding. Serbia will work on the improvement of civilian protection and personnel training and the constant improvement of the envisaged measures that are taken when encountering a threat of breach of embankments or flash floods. At the same time, the assistance in the procurement of equipment for the rehabilitation of the consequences, such as pumps, aggregates, drying equipment, tents, field beds and so on, are also necessary.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia, after a thorough evaluation, and in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations, has made a report and assessed the damage regarding floods. The damage is enormous, amounting to 1.5 billion Euros. Particularly affected are housing, health, education, agriculture, the flood control system, mining and energy, manufacturing and trade, water supply, waste water and waste, i.e. the environment, transport and communications.

We will have to cope with the immediate effects of the flooding for months, perhaps years, and it is certain that this natural disaster will cause a recession in the Serbian economy. This means that the Serbian economy will in 2014, according to estimates, record a decline of 0.4% instead of 0.5% growth as earlier projections predicted.

Friends,

Once again, Serbia is grateful that you have responded and showed a readiness to impart the much needed support, and help my country and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I expect that you will thoroughly inform your governments with the consequences of the floods and that you will, as much as you can, find a way to provide us with adequate assistance. I would like to express gratitude to many countries, without naming them all as I would certainly forget some, which have provided significant financial and other assistance immediately after the outbreak of the crisis caused by the floods. Once again I would like to thank the organizers and all the participants, from around the world, for their readiness to help us.

Serbia never forgets benefaction. It has raised a monument of gratitude to France for the assistance in WWI and will duly mark the unprecedented siding of the whole world with our people, with a monument in one of the flooded towns.

It will be a reminder to respect nature, but also a monument to perpetuate human solidarity - a virtue we are all proud of.

I know my people well. Your goodness will never be forgotten, neither by us, nor by our descendants.

Thank you.