

Statement by Montenegro at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

Maintenance of International Peace and Security:
“War, its lessons, and the search for a permanent peace”

29 January 2014

(Unofficial Transcript)

Permit me to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption and conduct of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I would like to thank you for organizing this important debate. Let me also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing.

Montenegro fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would, however, like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Montenegro's long and proud history has been marked by numerous wars — two World Wars as well as two Balkan wars in the twentieth century alone. Even though it did not bring war directly to the soil of Montenegro, the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, in the 1990s, also saw war-like clashes that affected the whole region. As our history suggests, unfortunately, Montenegro has been no stranger to war. But it is important to stress here that Montenegro has strictly and solely fought freedom wars, never having any territorial or other ambitions and claims, notwithstanding the fact that war, especially in the Balkans, in the historical context, presumed that struggle for liberation implied changing border lines.

As a small country to which these various wars brought so much suffering, including of an existential nature in the aftermath of the First World War, Montenegro has been in a position to draw many lessons from those experience and, as a result, base its modern national strategic policy and orientation on the premises of peaceful solutions, relations and coexistence. History has taught Montenegro something that cannot be emphasized enough in the current and ever-fragile international peace and security context, that is, the best and only truly sustainable way to solve differences and rectify tensions and conflict situations is through peaceful means, in the spirit of dialogue, committed to diplomatic and political efforts and tools.

One of the main prerequisites in that sense is the need for the parties in conflict to show a willingness to accept painful compromises for the greater good. As bloody as the price of independence for some ex-Yugoslav was, Montenegro was able to regain its independence, in 2006, in a completely peaceful manner. The Montenegrin leadership at the time took some very difficult decisions, including the acceptance of threshold of a 55 per cent majority set under the facilitation of the European Union, which marked the first time such a threshold had been established and used. When combined with other aspects, such as the wisdom and sense of being patient at such a historic juncture and waiting for the right moment and conducive environment to hold a referendum, as well as to exercise an open and transparent approach with our counterparts, the end result was a separation between Serbia and Montenegro that came about peacefully, although it had had the potential to be violent.

It is in that framework that I would like to underline the significance of the United Nations early detection and early-warning mechanisms. Our focus should definitely be strengthened towards preventive measures in order to avert crises from developing and escalating, and to mitigate the possible repercussions of crises. With that aim, as a member of the Group of Friends of Mediation, I would like to advocate that mediation truly be established as a core function of the United Nations, as prescribed in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. As such a cost-effective tool for the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict that has been largely under-utilized, mediation embodies one of the most important instruments at our disposal and rightfully deserves increased attention and resources of the United Nations system and United Nations membership as a whole.

The responsibility to protect and its further operationalization must also remain a priority. In an era of accountability, perpetrators of crimes against humanity should not go unpunished. Countries need to demonstrate strong commitment to the rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, democracy and the non-use of force in settling disputes.

Montenegro's path to renewed statehood was a carefully crafted, step-by-step process. The road to a political solution is often long and exhausting, especially if it concerns crisis and violent situations.

Sometimes the hardest step is to bring opposing parties to the negotiating table. In that context, I would like to highlight the positive and valuable role that regional and subregional organizations can play in facilitating the beginning of dialogue and a conciliatory tone, as we have seen recently in many instances in Africa. When regional or subregional approaches do not bear fruit, it is for the United Nations to step in and take ownership, as was done for the Syrian crisis, for which we commend the personal engagement and tireless efforts of the Secretary-General to take leadership and put his credibility and full weight behind organizing the second Geneva Conference on Syria.

The experience of the League of Nations after the First World War, followed by the nearly seven decades of the existence of the United Nations, even considering all of the weaknesses that have been seen along the way, point to the indispensable and vital role of such world organizations in the system of global governance — for ensuring global peace and security, development and respect for human rights and freedoms. In order to make sure that the United Nations maintains its rightful place as the central mechanism in global governance, the Organization has to take on a modern, reformed shape, one that recognizes new geopolitical realities and the world's evolving multifaceted conditions and environments.

Once the parties are brought together, it takes persistence, belief and serious commitment to the give-and-take process, which is carefully balanced and leaves no clear-cut winners or losers. It is only in that way that we can count on the sustainability of the outcomes reached and avoid relapse into crisis.

One crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked throughout the diplomatic process of searching for political solutions is the constructive and positive involvement of the relevant States and other stakeholders from the immediate and wider region, as well as global players who can use their influence over developments on the ground to help carve out the best possible resolution.

In conclusion, allow me to point out that the strategic priorities of Montenegro foreign policy are based on the pillars of developing good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, as well as developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation. For its pragmatic role that has no hidden agenda, and having no open issues with its neighbours, Montenegro has been recognized as the factor of stability in the region, fostering efforts for reconciliation and the promotion of overall regional cooperation.

Complementary to the irreplaceable undertakings of European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and efforts of countries in their respective integrations roads, all of Montenegro's activities are oriented towards the purpose of achieving permanent peace and prosperity in the region. Such a forward-looking attitude, geared towards the future, focusing on close cooperation for the benefit of all, working in the spirit of dialogue and compromise to overcome differences and at the same time ensuring that their peoples enjoy good living standards, is a recipe for success.

The best example is the European Union-facilitated landmark agreement between Serbia and Kosovo of April 2013, on the normalization of relations. The agreement marks a positive sign and will go a long way for both peoples — as well as for the whole region, which has had its share of turbulent times — as it will, hopefully, represent a shift away from harmful ideologies and ways of thinking towards peaceful and prosperous coexistence.