

H.E Mr. Sali Berisha
Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania

General Debate
66 Session of the UNGA

Mr. President

Mr. Secretary General

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First, I would like to extend my heartfelt wishes and congratulations to the President of the General Assembly for your election as the head of this Assembly as well as for successfully chairing its 66th session. I would also like to express my gratitude to your predecessor for his invaluable contribution.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to Secretary General Ban ki-moon for his excellent organization of this year's session and for his wise and determined leadership at the helm of the United Nation Organization throughout these years. We wish you, Mr. Secretary General, the utmost success in the next 4 years ahead.

Mr. President,

Our world today is experiencing major and complex crises that threaten the peace and stability of several regions as well as our planet as a whole. However, this year's spring was a great and historic one for Africa and the world. More than one hundred and twenty five million oppressed people stood up with courage determination and sacrifices and overthrew the tyrannical regimes of five countries in Africa and opened the gates of freedom for their nations.

As a representative of a country that only 20 years ago brought down the Hoxhaist Dictatorship, the worst Albania and Europe had known, I would like to cordially welcome the representatives of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, South Sudan and Ivory Coast who are present in this assembly session. Today we pay tribute to the thousands of citizens of these countries who with great courage and legendary bravery lost their lives

in order to liberate their countries from ruthless tyrannies and made their countries, the African continent and the entire world more free and just than ever. With their sacrifices, those who fought and fell for freedom have delivered, in the very hearts and minds of all oppressed people of our planet, a sacred message: “Be not afraid!”

Mr. President,

On the 20th anniversary of the fall of the communist dictatorship, despite the unquestionable difficulties inherent with building democracy based on market values; Albania has continuously affirmed that for the individual, for our country and our nation as a whole, freedom is the greatest of all assets and riches.

20 years ago, Albania was one of the three poorest countries in the world, plagued in extreme poverty and chronic starvation. Today, Albania belongs to the group of countries with middle to upper income levels.

A former totally hyper-collectivized country, it has today the smallest public sector in Europe, with more than 84% of its GDP coming from the private sector.

20 years ago, human rights and freedom were forbidden by the country’s constitution. Today, Albania is a country a functional democracy, freedom of the speech, free elections and minority rights fully respected, and a country of religious tolerance par excellence.

Albania was the most isolated country in the world. Now she is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance and is helping to offer its contribution to peace and stability in the region and beyond, while remaining firmly focused on its path towards EU integration.

Today, Albanians travel freely throughout Europe while the number of foreign citizens that have visited Albania for tourism and other purposes has increased from 300 thousand in 2004 to 3.5 million last year.

Recently, during this period of major European and global financial crises, Albania’s economy remained one of the few in the world that did not go into recession. UNCTAD estimates a decrease of some 37% in the level of direct foreign investments worldwide for the period 2007to 2010 while the same source confirms that FDI in Albania increased with some 316% in the period 2006 to 2010.

In the last few years, Albanian exports have grown by 300%. Unemployment has decreased and so did poverty by a margin of some 30%. Our economic model is totally based on economic freedom, which saw last year a major setback, worldwide, whereas in Albania economic freedom increased by 16 percent.

The Albanian economy is not detached from the global one the opposite is true, being a small economy it is linked to and affected by it. This is why I believe that four main factors determined such a performance.

First, a small government and public sector. Albania's public administration and public sector are at least 50% smaller than that of any other similar country in the region and beyond. Furthermore, I am pleased to state that my government ranks among the ten top governments with the least interference in the economy.

Second, Albania is a country of flat-rate taxes 10% with the lowest fiscal burden in Europe. The increase in fiscal freedom and successfully fighting corruption allowed us to double our revenues.

Third, we have made heavy investments in infrastructure to stimulate growth. My government has spent 8% to 10% of our GDP on road infrastructure alone, three years on the row. 8000 km of new roads have been constructed more than in the history of the country. Within the next two years, Albania will have a new and modern road infrastructure that will allow our citizens and also foreign visitors to reach our capital Tirana from any part of the country in 60% less time than what was needed before.

Fourth, we have made it easier to open a business or expand existing ones by putting in place an efficient digital one-stop-shop system for business registration, licenses and permits, and by drastically reducing bureaucratic procedures.

Yet, the debt and Euro crisis is standing like the sword of Damocles over our national currency the Lek and over the head of our economy. I take this opportunity to call upon the countries of the Euro zone to take into consideration the effects this crisis poses to ours and other euro-highly -linked economies.

“Albania, a Developed Country!” is the desire and biggest dream of all Albanians. I know that the road ahead of us is not at all smooth, it may be bumpy at times, but it is also the one that will climb higher and higher. I am convinced that it is a righteous and a sure path of hope through which the dream of a fully developed Albania will become true.

To achieve this dream, the government of Albania is committed to sustainable development. Developing countries and emerging markets have countless difficulties, but they also have the advantage of learning from the mistakes of developed countries and avoiding them. With this in mind, we are determined to turn Albania into a small superpower of renewable energy in the region. With its rich water recourses, Albania resembles a small Norway in the Balkan Peninsula. My government has already signed two hundred twenty contracts with the private sector to build hydroelectric plants, out of 450 that are foreseen to be built in the country. Companies from all over Europe and the rest of the world are already engaged in this process.

Additionally, major natural wind platforms exist throughout the country and the government has or is giving licenses for the production of thousands of megawatts of electricity through wind parks. Lastly, Albania is also one of the sunniest places in Europe and the government is determined to exploit solar energy as well as the geothermic one.

I believe that in addition to the great efforts to achieve an international legal framework to prevent global warming and lower greenhouse gas omissions, it is necessary to reach a quick agreement that a percentage of the aid that generous donors are offering to support this cause be used for the purpose of supporting private sector companies that are focused on renewable energy projects. These funds could be used to cover the cost of loan interests acquired for realizing renewable energy projects.

To combat climate change and improve environment conditions, forestation also remains a very important action. The UN Billion Tree campaign has been met with a successful response by many countries and it deserves credit as a first important step. However, our potentials are much larger.

The government of Albania has started an ambitious programme in order to take advantage of our country's potential for fruit trees. We intend to plant in the next 8 years some 50 million olive trees and around 200 million various nut trees. The project started two years ago and is subsidized by public funds. I am pleased to let you know that this project is moving rapidly ahead, as a matter of fact it has turned into a real unprecedented tree planting passion! Albania will welcome any help from the UN and/or its member states to successfully complete this project.

Mr. President,

Albania fully supports the Partnership for Open Government initiated by the President of the USA, Barack Obama and the President of Brasil, Vilma Rousef and that is why we have joined as a member of this initiative. Our efforts for an open government set as a primary objective the project "Albania in the digital age". In a short matter of time, we have expanded the Internet to all our schools and have started offering free Internet to every citizen in all post offices throughout the country.

2.1 million Albanians have availed themselves of this opportunity and have been navigating the Internet, some of them for the first time in their lives. This has helped increase the percentage of the population in Albania using the Internet from merely 4.8% to 60%, roughly 2/3 of the population. Free Internet will continue to be available in all post offices, in the future.

Moreover, the government is fully committed to making super broadband Internet available over the next two years and guarantee one stop shop services to the citizens throughout the country.

We believe that the digital age is above all the age of transparency. Based on this belief, Albania became the first country in the world with a 100% electronic system of procurement certified by UN agencies. This system led to a 6 times increase in participating bids in public procurement reducing the cost of procurement by 27%. Today, Albania is a country of e-tax, e-customs, e-university admissions, and e-business registration, e-civil status registry, and the government intends to offer all services to citizens into one-stop-shop.

E-government and transparency strengthen democracy and our law also guarantees free access for every citizen to all acts, decisions and/or public expenditures of government. In order to strengthen the role of civil society, the government has also approved specific budgetary provisions and these funds are administered by an independent board of the civil society.

Mr. President,

Albania has excellent relations with its immediate neighbors and in general with the countries of the region. We would like to develop and consolidate further relations with the Republic of Serbia as well. I remain fully convinced that Serbs and Albanians must engage in a process of dialog and cooperation in order to open a new chapter in their relations.

I am very pleased to let you know that the Government of Kosova possesses an equally strong will for good neighborly relations and has shown assiduous commitment and seriousness in the process of negotiations in Brussels

The International Court of Justice decided in July 2010, in the Hague, that the declaration of independence of Kosova is in full compliance with international law. The Republic of Kosova has been recognized by more than 80 states and I avail of this opportunity to call upon the rest of the states, members of the UN, to recognize the free and independent state of Kosova, which has become, in fact, an important factor of peace, stability and cooperation in our region.

I also call upon Serbia which went through this assembly to ask the opinion of the International Court of Justice to adapt its position in line with the decision of the Court, thus demonstrating that it accepts and respects the international law in its entirety and not only those parts that serve its case.

In accordance with President Ahtisaari's package and in close cooperation with EULEX, KFOR and other international institutions present in the country, the Republic of Kosova has put in place and implemented the highest standards in the region and beyond as regards the freedoms and rights of minorities.

The most worrying problems for the Serbs in Kosova today are the tensions created and orchestrated for nationalistic purposes. Serbian cultural heritage in Kosova is today more secured than ever. This is a precious cultural heritage not only for the Serbs but also for Albanians and all other citizens of Kosova as well as for Serbia, the entire region and Europe. I would like to reassure you, distinguish representatives of the member states that the only threat they face is their exploitation to serve purposes of a bitter past that must not ever return.

Meanwhile, interethnic relations in all areas where Serbs and Albanians live together in the same communities are very good. However, the parallel structures paid by Belgrade in the three Serbian homogenous communes north of Mitrovica, where no other ethnic groups reside, have turned them in safe haven for organized crime and smuggling of all sorts. The Government of the Republic of Kosova is determined to implement the rule of law in these communes and effective boarder and customs' control in full compliance with the agreement reached in Brussels and the Ahtisaari document. The Republic of Kosova is not doing anything else but making sure that its constitutional order is observed throughout its sovereign territory in full accordance with international law and the decision of the International Court of Justice.

This effort, however, has met strong resistance from criminal groups and organized gangs that with weapons and other means are doing all in their hand to devastate the rule of law. We have supported and will continue to support the Government of Kosova, EULEX and KFOR in their efforts to strengthen the law and order in all the territory of the Republic of Kosova. I believe that this is going to serve the best interest of all its citizens, be they Albanians, Montenegrins, Turks, Bosnians or even Serbs.

We believe that respect for the actual borders in the Balkans is a fundamental condition for lasting peace and stability. Belgrade's efforts to maintain in place in these three communes parallel structures of authority demonstrate that it still believes in reshaping borders in our region based on the failed and long time overdue idea of ethnically "clean" countries and Greater Serbia.

The Republic of Serbia, in implementation of the international law, arrested during this years the butcher of Balkans, and although late, his lieutenants as well, and has received the due appreciation of the international community for this. However, I invite Serbia to cooperate in the finding and the return of the remains of 1500 men, women, children and elderly that were abducted from their homes and were masacred in the territory of Serbia only because they were Albanians. It is very important to clean-up your country from those who have committed crimes against humanity, but it is as important not to hide or sleep over the graves of their victims. Here, yesterday, President Tadic underlined as truthful the acusations raised by senator Dick Marti regarding the alleged trafic of organs and mass graves committed by Albanians. Regarding this report, I would like to state here the stance of the Albanian government. The report of senator Dick Marti, as acknowleged from the General Prosecutor of Serbia, Vukcevic

himself, who states that he finds his report fully included in Marti's report, is a cut and paste of Vukcevic's report.

Every person who reads these reports realizes that senator Dick Marti must be blinded by hate and antialbanian racism that transpires in every paragraph of these reports and have in reality no connection with the crimes of which he alleges. The Dick Marti Report or let's call it Dick Marti/Vukcevic Report does not produce a mere single fact. I must clarify here that this Marti/Vukcevic Report synthesizes Karla del Ponte memoirs, which seem to have derived from the same (unique) source. In thousand pages of Milosevic's interrogation transcripts in the Hage there is not a word about organs trafficking or massive graves in Albania. The Marti/Vukcevic Report is a fiction that had as its own purpose to divert attention from the decision of the International Court of Justice in favor of the independence of Kosova.

Notwithstanding this, the Government of Albania has officially invited EULEX to investigate all aspects of these allegations that involve any part of territories of the Republic of Albania. On behalf of the Government of Albania I would like to thank you EULEX for accepted this invitation and reassure it that my government will cooperate fully with the investigation team and it will offer them all facilities they need to perform their tasks so that truth is brought to light.

Thank you.