



REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Address

by

H.E. Mr. Nikola Gruevski

President of the Government of the

Republic of Macedonia

at the

General Debate of the 68th Session of the

General Assembly of the United Nations

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Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by congratulating President Ashe on his election and wishing him great success in presiding over the UN General Assembly, congratulating at the same time the outgoing President Jeremic on his successful presidency. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his leadership aimed at strengthening the UN's ability to respond to today's and tomorrow's challenges.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Each year in September world leaders gather in New York to develop joint responses to challenges, and this is a great challenge for all; national governments, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector.

We share the primary responsibility for a peaceful and secure world, which will ensure the rights and interests of individuals, nations and countries within the framework of the rule of national and international law. That was also the objective when the United Nations was established after the World War II.

Mr. President and Mr. Secretary-General,

We thank you both for your engagement and leadership in setting the new development framework which projects beyond 2015, building upon the Millennium Development Goals, with an economic, social and ecological dimension of sustainable development. What is of importance for the post 2015 development agenda is building a global partnership among governments, the private sector, civil society and individuals and mobilization of institutional and human resources, in this ambitious and complex project. The environment must be a key building block of the sustainable development, for it is nature that sustains us and its resources should be used wisely. Economic growth facilitates human growth, reduces poverty, facilitates better education and healthcare and is, thus, a crucial element of any development framework. The Republic of Macedonia will fully contribute to the realization of all global objectives, through its national agenda in which investment in education, health, agriculture and food, environment and infrastructure and the partnership between the Government and the business community are the highest priorities.

Dear friends,

Peace, resolving conflicts and protecting human rights are UN postulates, and today, they are even a greater challenge that we should respond to and overcome. The Republic of Macedonia supports the approach of the United Nations in responding to these challenges. We actively contribute to the promotion of peace on an international level, participating in international missions that safeguard freedom and democracy.

Speaking of one of the major issues - the crisis in Syria and the internal conflict with more than 100 000 victims and 2 million refugees - what is more troubling while

pursuing diplomatic efforts is that the Syrian people were confronted with the use of chemical weapons which is strictly forbidden by international law. This must not be tolerated. We are among the countries that asked for urgent investigation, under the auspices of the Secretary General's Mechanism for the Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons. Despite differing views, all Member States of the Council and of the United Nations are united in that for the final resolution of the Syrian crisis, a chance should be given to the political approach. Therefore, it is essential to concentrate maximum efforts on revitalizing the search for a political settlement and convene the Geneva II conference as soon as possible. The Syrian people deserve better days through decisive action of the international community that will put an end to the violence and threats.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The region of South East Europe has entered the phase of positive development and in general, the national and regional primary objectives are either fulfilled or are within reach. Regional cooperation is expanding in a number of new fields. Despite this advance certain longstanding, unresolved or partly resolved bilateral issues have a clear negative reflection on our present and immediate future, and in the case of the Republic of Macedonia, it happens to be a serious obstacle to the agenda for integration into international organizations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Macedonia is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its UN membership with the still unresolved issue regarding the use of the name of my country, the Republic of Macedonia and an issue regarding the identity of my people, the Macedonian identity, issues that emerged because of a dispute raised by our southern neighbor Greece which opposes our name which is our fundamental individual and collective right. That issue which should have been promptly resolved among neighbors, partners and future allies has lasted for 22 years. An issue which, according to my deep conviction, although being a very realistic problem for my people, is in its essence a virtual one and does not have any grounds in international law, nor in the United Nation's acts and it is difficult, I would even say, impossible, for somebody to find a legal justification for its existence.

The overwhelming majority of countries that have recognized our constitutional name, the Republic of Macedonia, over 135 of them being UN members, clearly show that most of the countries do not believe that this dispute has a justified political basis, or if there is such, they denounce it. It is created, I believe, as classic politicization and is an instrument that around 20 years ago was either supposed to bring to someone partial political points or, by creating an atmosphere of conflict, to make some strategic regional shifts, but also to slow down the diffusion of freedom, democracy and market economy in the Balkans.

The UN discussed last year the issue of the rule of law and all member states unanimously agreed that the respect of internationally agreed norms and principles is a must. Unfortunately, the norms are not always adhered to and the United Nations must

not be inert in that regard and abstract itself from the responsibility for the disrespect for the rule of law.

The Republic of Macedonia became a UN member in 1993 with an atypical membership condition, which was the denial of its Constitutional name, and it was admitted under a temporary and interim reference for the country, a precedent that has never occurred before in history and is contrary to the acts of the international community and law; but we have endured all that, although it lingers on as a problem up to now.

In 1995 we signed with Greece, with UN mediation, an Interim Accord, with which we have changed our flag and parts of our Constitution, while Greece had an obligation not to create obstacles for our NATO accession in 2008; and not only has it obstructed the act of accession to the international organization itself, but it also expanded these obstructions to the processes of opening the procedure for membership in another organization and four years in a row, it prevents the start of negotiations for our EU membership.

In 2010, the Hague International Court of Justice, which is the principal organ of the United Nations, established by its member countries, on the basis of our appeal for the obstructions made by Greece concerning our memberships, made a judgment that Greece had violated the international law by not adhering to the Interim Accord and that the Republic of Macedonia had not done anything to violate the international law and the commitments it had undertaken. However, we are hindered again, notwithstanding the decision of the highest body of justice in the world, and that is apparent to this Assembly and its member countries.

The UN was established in order to protect international law. There is no regulation of international law that imposes on a country not to be able to call itself as it wishes, and its citizens not to be able to be called and named as they want to. Naming is one of the five elements of states and it is an undisputed right of every member country.

Why do we need international law if we do not adhere to it? If we turn a blind eye to this injustice and an obvious violation of international law, we will be directly responsible for breaking one of the postulates of world peace and the UN. We do not want that, nor can we allow it. If it were not for international law, anarchy would exist, and the UN would become a debate club without any fundamental competences. We do not want to participate in that, at the expense of everything, even to our own detriment.

If we do not respect international law, we also do not have any respect for the 50 million victims that fought for it 70 years ago and we will go against the decisions of our predecessors – founders of this Organization. International law should not be a platitude, but rather a solution to every challenge.

Following international law, the Republic of Macedonia is entitled to decide on its own name, and to name its identity as Macedonian. Solving the differences with our southern neighbor is our priority, but precisely and only within the UN resolutions that define the solution that is subject to discussions and a mutually acceptable solution, and in no other way, and especially not by expanding those limits.

Sixty six years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, with this dispute that is unjustly imposed on us by Greece, one of the fundamental rights of the individual is also violated, and that is the right to decide one's own name. Every representative of my people is denied the right to be called as they feel, as their mothers and fathers, grandparents and all other ancestors throughout history were named – Macedonian. In addition to disputing the Constitutional name of my country – the Republic of Macedonia, Greece also disputes the identity of my citizens, that is, it does not allow for them to be called Macedonians and the language that they speak to be called the Macedonian language although ever since more than half a century ago within the Universities worldwide there have been departments where the Macedonian language has been studied and it has been called the Macedonian language. It is the same as if somebody denied you to speak French, German, Polish, English, Dutch, Portuguese, Japanese, Hindi or any other language. The United Nations must not overlook the violation of this fundamental human right – to be able to decide on one's own name - and should show a fundamental activity to enable the exercise of that right, and in this particular case an activity that will lead to a solution of these outstanding issues that Greece has with us.

Last year we debated about preventive diplomacy and we concluded that it should be an essential element of the international community. Therefore, the UN must not and should not stand aside in this process that strongly impedes Macedonian aspirations for a better future for its citizens. An engagement is necessary to make possible for Greece to embark on solving this issue, because in the last two years there has been a great inertness on the Greek part which, although a result of objective reasons caused by their adverse economic situation, it has also a strategic and tactical political element based on the analysis that by prolonging the process of not solving the dispute, it would contribute to the Republic of Macedonia being isolated in its positions that are based on international law and values and to sign a kind of self-extinguishment of the state and the nation by agreeing to be re-named. In that analysis, it is estimated that with the lack of intensity in the discussions, my country being faced with blocked European and Euro-Atlantic integrations that are hindered directly by the dispute, despite having met the standards that were required from us by the international multilateral organizations (NATO and EU) that we are prevented to join, and faced with the possibility of internal misunderstandings around this hindrance caused by our southern neighbor, that we would drop our guard in spite of the power of the arguments that are on our side. It is true that by putting off the solution to the dispute, more challenges in the country and the region are created, and the tension becomes greater at certain moments, but it should be clear to everybody that such challenges should not be considered as a trigger for any changes of our justified and internationally correct position, that would lead to a change of our Macedonian identity. It is not possible to

change something that has existed for centuries by imposing positions of blockages or by threats about possible misunderstandings, tensions or unrest, not even by effectuating them. The Macedonian people will never accept being renamed, and if it is impossible for this issue to be solved now, although we are those who are most interested in its solution and we sincerely wish for a solution to be found that will be sustainable, balanced, and most importantly, mutually acceptable, then some other generation in different circumstances will be able to solve it, but precisely on the basis of the values, positions and principles that I mentioned before, and which indicate a just and fair solution, without winners and losers. However, I personally consider that we must not leave the thorny issues to future generations, but we must try to find a solution and find strength to provide prosperity for the countries and the region.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Distinguished country representatives,

It is said that actions speak solely of those who undertake them. Faced with the lack of interest by the Hellenic Republic in substantial talks for a solution to the dispute, two months ago I suggested to the Greek Prime Minister a change of the format of discussions, that is, raising them to a much higher political level - I as a Macedonian and he as a Greek Prime Minister, together with Ministers from both Governments to meet directly and talk about a solution. That would lead to greater efficiency, because we are the one most often called to solve this issue. 22 years are too much time for not getting anywhere and are sufficient proof that there must be a change in the game. Our mandate, entrusted to us by the citizens, should be essential for achieving a mutually acceptable solution for which I believe that it is possible to be attained, a solution that will be accepted and agreed upon by the citizens of our countries. The examples of Serbia and Kosovo as well as Croatia and Slovenia, where political representatives at the highest level managed to overcome challenges, are the best proof that results can be achieved in this way. I invite you to directly take part in the realization of this initiative, and overcoming the standstill and, with your engagement, to provide intensity and movement forward, as well as greater interest on the part of Greece in a solution and progress. The actions speak of the one who undertakes them. We, precisely with our openness and with our initiative that is justified, show that we wish for a solution to be found. But, our meetings must not be a pure formality, they should rather contain an essence, and must not create an alibi for not finding a solution.

I am convinced that only essential engagement by the international community, above all that of the UN, will lead to a solution, taking into consideration the basic documents of the UN for the rights of the countries and the individuals, the UN resolutions that defined the talks, agreements guaranteed by the UN, the decision of the UN bodies and the international law as a whole.

However, if there is not any progress, the UN must not stand still and be satisfied with the status quo situation, because it would mean showing additional irresponsibility. The UN should, aware of this already discouraging situation, help with their mechanisms, through the General Assembly, and also the Security Council, on the basis of whose resolution we are talking with our neighbor, to arrive at a solution that will unlock the perspectives of my country. Otherwise, the UN will be faced with failure again and will bear the responsibility because of not reacting in accordance with its own

principles and values. I do not want to pardon anybody, we all have responsibility, but also this Organization which instead of accepting the comfort of being silent and not solving this dispute and instead of defending itself by being dormant in this status quo situation, which is obviously creating problems and challenges for the region, should start considering alternative scenarios and stimulate more boldly a solution of this long standing dispute.

I am confident that we do have capacity to jointly respond to all challenges. In the name of the people that we represent, we must assume responsibility for the present and the future. Assuming such responsibility will mean taking decisions, changes of habits, strengthened cooperation and prosperity – but it is something that can be done. That is the responsible way of how to proceed further.

Thank you.