

Ladies and gentlemen, friends...

(1) Intro

Thank you for having me for this conversation. As you know this is not my first time here that I intend to speak about the UN, multilateralism and why I so much believe in it.

When I came here in February 2015, I laid out my vision of multilateralism in detail. I spoke about my understanding of the world we are living in. I touched upon the role of the UN in it and its capacities and engagement. I mentioned challenges and crises, both regional and global. I stressed prevention and mediation as the key instruments at our disposal. And I also briefly informed you about my professional experience.

I am here today as active foreign minister in my third term. And I meet you also in capacity of the current EU Presidency. But primarily I stand here for the first time as an official and the only candidate from Central Europe for the post of UN Secretary-General.

It might have taken more time than expected to announce my candidature. I ultimately made up my mind based on encouragement received from both home and abroad. But what truly convinced me to run for this post was strong boost across the political spectrum in Slovakia. I got direct and unwavering support from the president, speaker of the parliament and prime minister. But I also felt it from the general public, NGOs, journalists, experts...

(2) About me, my experience and skills

I was born in one system. I watched and actively helped with unique transformation of political, economic and social reality into a completely new one. And now I am directly involved in forming it to best serve our people.

So I have lived in two systems. I very well know how good or bad they are. And I fully understand – both as a citizen and diplomat - what such enormous change means to people, system, power structures. This is my home experience.

But I also served the international community. Twice under the UN, 3 times on behalf of the EU.

I oversaw the peaceful separation of Serbia and Montenegro. Independent Montenegro became the first and only post-Yugoslav country born as a result of an EU negotiated process and without violence. Later I was international administrator of Bosnia and Herzegovina - a unique crossroad of Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox cultures.

This engagement helped me understand the world a lot. But it mostly gave me wisdom and skills that I try to keep ever since all my professional life:

- Deal with any problem with an open heart and good intentions. Create TRUST.
- Keep it positive. Do it FOR something or someone. Not AGAINST. Make friends not enemies.
- Talk, maintain dialogue and compromise. Never shut the door.
- Treat partners according to their relevance, not your liking. Avoid labeling good or bad.
- Listen to all sides without favoring one or the other. But also hear well and understand.
- Respect local environment. Its history, mentality, traditions.
- Be aware that no problem is universal. Opt for tailor-made. There is no such thing as a one size fits all.

(4) Respect and role for the UN

I have accepted my Government's nomination with humility and respect. I am a believer and long-time advocate of the UN as a cornerstone of effective multilateralism. I want to see this organization as effective, dynamic and reliable. An organization nations respect and trust. The only organization able to make a real positive difference in peoples' lives globally.

When serving under the UN flag I learned first-hand how tough it was. This experience deepened my already great respect for the UN and for all who work for it. Be it peacekeepers, humanitarian officers, political agents, social workers. I got to understand that sustained peace would be unattainable without a well-functioning UN. So I want to contribute to its work, because I believe I can further deliver.

I believe in the convening power of the UN that brings everyone to the table. And the SG should be the convincing power to build bridges and foster mutual understanding. A communicator, facilitating and mediating a consensus. Someone, who comes up with an initiative and garners widest possible support for it.

I also believe that no system can work unless we respect rules. I prefer using existing tools, strengthened where necessary, for example by tailor-made ad hoc mechanisms.

I am a realist fully aware of the mandate and competencies of the SG. The UN belongs to its Member States and any change in its functioning is in their hands. Any substantial progress is a matter of collective political will.

However, the SG will have to ensure that the UN system is fully adapted to new agendas and challenges. He or she will have to provide guidance in the work of the UN Secretariat and make sure that the whole UN system acts coherently and in an integrated manner.

We need action on many issues of global significance. Generally speaking, we are satisfied with the UN's work. There are areas where it is strong and excellent, such as development.

Yet we need to do better on some fronts. To improve our efforts in the area of international peace and security. To strengthen the UN's ability to effectively maintain peace and stability and protect civilians.

I consider it very important for new SG to build a constructive, productive and mutually beneficial relationship with the UN Security Council, in line with the UN Charter. Joining forces is of major importance for the success of the whole organization.

(5) My priorities

Understanding the enormous responsibility and huge expectations, I welcome and appreciate the openness and transparency of the current selection process. It gives the candidates a great possibility to present themselves and their views.

My priorities are simple. They reflect my long standing professional quest to strengthen the multilateral system, with the UN at its center.

A UN SG is a person who advocates common good, a set of values and human dignity that all people want regardless of where they come from. So let me reiterate what I said at this forum a year and a half ago:

"Many think that most of the pressing international issues stem from a different notion of values. I don't really think that the core values of each and every one of us differ that much from region to region. Peace, security, stability, family, prosperity, well-being ... But how's that different in Beijing, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Cairo or Dhaka from what it is in Geneva, New York, Moscow, Lima or Brussels? It simply isn't." This is my point of departure.

1/ So first of all I do not want to see people stripped of all these values. And therefore no wonder that conflict prevention and mediation is my absolute top priority. Because by preventing wars we save lives! And besides that a dollar spent on prevention can save up to 10 dollars on humanitarian aid. I thus feel strongly that prevention must return to the fore of UN activities as a concerted action!

A particular focus must be put on the pre-conflict phase (build-up of tensions/escalation) with the need to act before the conflict breaks out and with strengthened UN capacities such as early warning, mediation, good-offices.

Peacekeeping operations should have clear, credible and achievable mandates but also

faster deployment. They must be more effective, more responsive and accountable with enhanced coordination with regional and international partners.

Post-conflict arrangements must also include better coordination of regional and international actors, cultural awareness and respect for local particularities. Security Sector Reform, our flagship Slovak initiative, is a key instrument here.

The new SG, among other things, also should:

- Renew focus on the field and enhance assessment and monitoring capabilities of UN field offices and, where appropriate, create regional offices of preventive diplomacy.
- Enhance the pool of local negotiators to respect the need for local ownership
- Enhance dialogue between the SG and the Security Council - some conflicts have dangerous spill-over potential but are not large enough to attract immediate attention
- Team up with all actors – national, regional, international, governments, NGOs, private, public

2/ Development is my second priority and my next concern even though we did here very well last year. I am referring to the SDG's, Paris, Addis Ababa, Sendai but also Istanbul a couple of months ago.

The SDG's are the most promising, most comprehensive and most ambitious pledge to change the world in 15 years. Our common key challenge now is to make sure it gets implemented early and thoroughly. We must ensure that every individual receives the full package of opportunities the SDGs offer leaving no one behind.

Also, unprecedented surge in humanitarian needs calls for better resource mobilization, quicker response mechanisms and better coordination among all stakeholders.

We thus need to adjust institutional system accordingly. Including monitoring and evaluation making full use of available indicators.

Additionally it is essential to:

- Keep political momentum and help inject political impetus to implementation efforts
- Put emphasis on national ownership and leadership
- Work on strengthening the catalytic role of the UN in order to respond to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable but also middle income countries

- Revitalize new global partnership by involving all relevant stakeholders including the private sector and civil society

3/ The UN must continue to be the leading advocate for human rights and international law. The role of the UN is to strive that every individual lives in peace, security and dignity in just and prosperous world. All individuals are equal and human rights are universal. But we must avoid politicizing. Respecting local sensitivities is a must to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

Human rights violations are often the first indicators of instability. So whenever there is such a risk, we must act resolutely.

To systematically prevent abuse of human rights, we have to make sure that the UN takes up the initiative. It is essential to continue with the institutional consolidation of the UN human rights system. It must be mainstreamed across all UN activities and adequately resourced.

Apart of other things the SG should:

- Prevent or mitigate human rights violations through early and coordinated preventive action
- Put in place coherent approach to address early warning signs of instability
- consider possibility of enhancing independence of the Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Rule of Law is also an essential element in building and preserving sustainable peace and thus it has to be strengthened. We need a comprehensive assessment of the UN Rule of Law processes and to explore how to rule of law stronger throughout the UN system.

4/ Finally, let me mention the role of the SG as chief administrative officer.

None of our objectives can be achieved without a competent, functional and effective Secretariat. We must respond effectively to constantly evolving needs. It requires continuous adjustments, improvements and adaptation. It is imperative that there is no asymmetry between what the world needs and our ability to deliver.

It is crucial to ensure full transparency and accountability of the UN Staff, starting with the SG. All positions in the UN must be based on a just geographical and gender balance. Nonetheless, qualifications and competencies remain most important.

Equal participation and full involvement of women at all decision-making levels must be a norm in the 21st century across the whole UN system. We need more women in senior positions at the Headquarters and in the field. I would nominate a woman from the Global South as Deputy Secretary-General. And as a candidate with agenda of preventive diplomacy at its core, I would appoint more women as special

representatives and envoys.

Sound management of financial resources according to the principles of budgetary discipline is equally important. Effective oversight and strong accountability come with it too.

On all these issues I want to lead by example. Professionalism and the highest ethical standards are my main guiding principles. I shall motivate and inspire, promote team work, communicate clearly and expect best possible results. I am not afraid of responsibility and full accountability. And I have played by rules and openly all my life.

(6) Conclusion

My feeling is that the UN system has all that is needed. Institutions, norms and know-how. There are capacities, human resources, brains and hands. But maybe the system is not adequately set to be able to deal with today's challenges. So it is time to identify ways how to do things better and how to use the existing instruments and processes more efficiently.

On top of that we need our common sense, good will and the art of listening. Such combination will produce respect, encourage tolerance and lead to agreements. This would be our investment in a new era of modern multilateralism. Perfectly fit for the 21st century.