

Honorable President, Secretary General, dear friends

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of you all, as International Secretary of Social Democratic Party of Serbia and on behalf of the president of the party Mr. Rasim Ljajic who unfortunately, due to health reasons, was not being able to participate in the meeting. He sends his greetings and support.

It is a great opportunity for all of us to convey and share a strong message from this meeting about role that Socialist International, social democrat and progressive movement play in the world.

We in SDPS, today, more than ever, see the need for clear and unequivocal ideological commitment to put in the field of strengthening democracy, social solidarity, social dialogue, and respect for human rights. That is why, we in SDPS seek and hope to gain a full membership in Socialist international.

The Social Democratic Party of Serbia is committed more than ever to an internationalist outlook and an internationalist future of the progressive movement. We sincerely believe that it is of utmost importance, in light of the current geopolitical moment, that SDPS becomes a full member of SI so that together we can make the needed impact, facing together all the challenges in front of us all. Considering the current geopolitical moment, we are continuously committed to strengthening our cooperation in the region of Western Balkans and our integration in the European Union.

We are not the backyard of the Europe but in the center, and the countries of Western Balkans are of strategic importance for the stability of the region and whole of Europe. Western Balkan integration in the European Union is a matter of security. The integration of the countries from Western Balkan region in the EU has been an ongoing process for almost two decades now. Nevertheless, we still believe the upcoming decisions will be the crucial for our future.

As Socialist international, we must strengthen and support integration of the Western Balkans, because any further delay will make the region more vulnerable and unstable.

We must jointly create the needed impact, having in mind our responsibility as social democrats toward citizens and their needs, fears, uncertainties.

*Democracy is vital in giving voice to those we seek to represent, whose lives we have vowed to improve, their fears of hardship to conquer and their hope of a better and just tomorrow to achieve.*

Our new creed should be that democracy is empathy, that democracy is caring about each other of each member of our society and their unique needs. Democracy should never be just a check on some abstract power, it should mean listening with care to the voice of millions and listening to the faintest voice of one individual lost at sea, metaphorically speaking.

I want, as well, to stress importance of gender equality in context of strengthening democracy and human rights.

I am proud and grateful to President George Papandreou, Vice President Sanchez, and general secretary Ayala for understanding that we need more women in politics, because women bring us not just new quality in decision-making and governing, but they steer us towards functional and better societies. What is good for the women is good for the whole society. I am proud that wisest among us understand that we have to bring forward more women at the decision-making table, negotiations tables and peace processes, president Papandreou, Vice President Sanchez, and secretary general Mr. Ayala, spoke about that yesterday.

The time has come for gender power-sharing, and we in Socialist international must persist in our joint struggle until women are equal at the decision-making tables. Now it is clear and widely recognized that women's power is a strategic asset that cannot be ignored anymore. The evidence is clear: having women at the peace table generates greater buy-in, strengthens accountability for implementation and makes peace sustainable, because, with their inputs, agreements go beyond the realm of power into the reality of people's lives.

Global and regional cooperation rooted in values of solidarity and equality is necessary if we want to successfully and in a socially just way meet challenges that are, more than ever before, global in their scope.

Democracy is the most valuable instrument that shape socialist and social democratic policy.

We as social democrats always advocated for a tolerant society free from all forms of discrimination, with true equality of rights and opportunities. Unfortunately, populism, extreme rights nationalists, xenophobia and divided, polarized world are our reality in countries all over the world. The response to this populism, which threatens hard-won freedoms, must be for us, socialist and social democrats to intensify struggle to reduce inequalities, increase opportunities and achieve sustainable growth to the benefit of all citizens.

From the existential threat of climate change to issues of making the global economy work for the benefit of workers across the world and making sure that workers' rights are always respected it is more than ever obvious that global challenges demand international cooperation, but that has also shown that global crisis magnifies global inequality, and it is our duty to together make sure that no one is left behind and everyone has equal access to necessary medical and any other necessary care.

Only together we can contribute to the preservation of peace and stability and face with all challenges in front of us.

Due to lack of time, and so many other speakers who need to address, I finish here. Thank you for your attention.

International Secretary of Social Democratic Party of Serbia

Nataša Mihailović Vacić