**Speech**

**Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Independence Day, the 1st of March, and the Day of Gratitude, the 6th of March 2022**

On March 1, 2022, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina celebrate a jubilee – the 30th anniversary of their homeland’s proclamation of independence. This day, this act, is the most significant historic and state-building act of Bosnia and Herzegovina since WWII. More than 2 million Bosnian citizens – just as those of Slovenia, Croatia, and today’s North Macedonia – decided to leave what was already a damaged Yugoslavia, and to live in an independent and sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Some claim it was this act that caused the war, and that the referendum was carried out against the will of one of the ethnicities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is not true. Bosnian Serbs and the people from the state of Serbia were not the reason for Bosnian and Herzegovinian exit from Yugoslavia. Bosnia did not leave Yugoslavia because of the rich cultural and historical heritage it shared with Serbia and other Yugoslav republics. Bosnia left Yugoslavia because the mad regime of Slobodan Milošević was destroying Yugoslavia and building a Greater Serbia on its ruins. The Republic of Serbia was the first to breach the Yugoslav Constitution. It used the Yugoslav treasury to finance its wars waged in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and, finally, in Kosovo. To remain in Milošević’s broken Yugoslavia meant to participate in his atrocious crimes.

It is from this place that we state to the people at home and abroad, and to the various officials and political decision-makers, that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was an unjust war, the war of aggression lead by Milošević’s Serbia and later Tuđman’s Croatia. It was the war imposed by those who had never lived in Bosnia, those who refused to understand and accept Bosnia, those who wanted to destroy, divide, and tear it apart and to lead its peoples into bloody fratricide. To our joint misfortune, the authorities in Belgrade and Banja Luka, and the Tuđman’s regime at a later stage of war, misled, confused, frightened, and used media to indoctrinate many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to refute the 1st of March as their holiday, to reject Bosnia and Herzegovina as their state and homeland.

The fact is that Bosnian citizens have different perceptions of the independence, history, and state. In this way, Bosnia is like all other European states where different communities have different views of their own history and culture. But none of them deny the right of those states and societies to exist. No one should deny the right of Bosnia and Herzegovina to exist as a united, independent, and internationally recognized state. We all share a language, history, and culture; we share the same virtues and faults, successes and defeats, wars, crimes, and victims. Bosnia and Herzegovina is our homeland, where our ancestors lived together for centuries; where, today, there is enough room and resources for its citizens to live in dignity and where there will be plenty of space for future generations.

Despite the fact that our homeland, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina now celebrates three decades of its independence, as well as the international recognition and membership in the United Nations, propaganda campaigns which seek to deny its statehood and independence have never ceased. The thousand-year long history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is ignored and revised.

It is from this place that we call upon all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to reject the devastating politics and rhetoric, and to embrace their neighbors and compatriots, to embrace their differences, to embrace their joint homeland and seek constructive political ideas and actions which will bring us reconciliation, confrontation with the past, and a just peace and prosperity for all.

We cannot avoid mentioning that the 30th anniversary of independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina takes place at the darkest moment of the 21th century, while a destructive and aggressive campaign is being carried out by the powerful regime in Moscow against its weaker neighbor. The images from Ukraine are upsetting every Bosnian and Herzegovinian. The destiny and the struggle of the Ukrainian people are the reminder of our collective traumas. Just as it was in Bosnia, in Ukraine we witness a defense of international law, human and civil rights and democratic values, along with the right of its people to live freely, independent, and protected from persecution and violence, in a democratic state ruled by law.

In addition to Independence Day, we are today celebrating the Day of Gratitude. This is not a public holiday, but today we citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are expressing, in more than 20 countries across the world, our gratitude to the states that recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina thirty years ago. We dedicate this Day of Gratitude to the citizens, societies and states of Europe that helped Bosnia and its citizens to survive the horrors of war, receiving its refugees and offering them a safe and dignified life. Our gratitude goes to the countries that opened their doors and secured a dignified life to our citizens in the time when the forces of darkness tried to erase our country, our people and our culture. We are grateful to the citizens and societies that gave us the chance to heal, recover, get educated, work and build our new homes in our new homelands.

Today, we are not just Bosnians and Herzegovinians; we are Italians, Finns, Danes, Dutch, Swedes, Americans, Canadians, Australians, French, Belgians, Germans, Austrians, Norwegians, British, Irish, Slovenians, and the citizens of the Republic of Croatia.

We are grateful to our neighbors and fellow citizens who have accepted us and who respect us as equal citizens, and as equal participants in the political and every other sphere of life. We are grateful to the European and world journalists, writers, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, international officials, intellectuals and some politicians who informed, bravely and without making any compromises, their governments and their public about the true character of the war in Yugoslavia and the war against Bosnia and Herzegovina in those dark times; who informed them about those who attacked and who defended it; the truth about concentration camps, as well as the scale and victims of those crimes. We think of them with gratitude every day, and today we say it out loud.

Thank you for everything! We ask you to continue influencing your statesmen, ministers, and journalists, to help us put an end to the continued destruction of our state by same kinds of forces that are destroying Kyiv these days, the forces that destroyed our beloved Sarajevo thirty years ago.

We, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, will continue to work on the development of our state, education, healthcare, and economy. We want to invest our knowledge and our money in our country so that young generations of Bosnians and Herzegovinians do not have to leave their homes. However, to be able to do it we must have a new Constitution that is aligned with the European Human Rights Convention. We must have politicians who do not deny genocide and continuously offend their neighbors. We must have a genuine rule of law so that the Republika Srpska, which is recognized as an entity even though multiple war crimes and genocide were committed in its name, is not allowed to create its own army again. On December 10, 2021, when the Nobel Prize for Peace was given, the Parliament of Republika Srpska voted illegally to reinstitute the Army of Republika Srpska. This is the very same army that committed genocide for which General Mladić and Karadžić were convicted in the Hague, where the President of Serbia, Milošević was indicted for genocide and where he died in prison.

Let Bosnians and Herzegovinians celebrate this Day of Gratitude with their neighbors and fellow citizens all over the world by presenting to them not only the history of our country, but also the best of its peoples’ tradition, culture, economy, and arts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a beautiful country. That is the reason why we are inviting you all to come to our Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Trebinje, Brčko, Srebrenica, Kozarac, Prijedor, Visoko, Međugorje, Hutovo Blato, to the Una, Vrbas, Drina, and Neretva rivers, and to the Jahorina, Bjelašnica and Igman mountains, where the 14th Winter Olympic Games were held.

**Dear friends visit our beautiful Bosnia and Herzegovina! And once there, feel at home just like we feel at home with you today.**