

**SPEECH OF THE AMBASSADOR OF ITALY,  
ANTONELLO DE RIU ON OCCASION OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC DAY**

*(Pristina, 4 June 2024)*

- *Honourable Prime Minister, Albin Kurti;*
  - *Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Members of the National Assembly, Mayors;*
  - *Dear Ambassadors, nationals, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;*
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- I am truly honoured to be here tonight, celebrating the historic anniversary of 1946 referendum where Italian people chose both a republican form of government and the legislative body that drafted the new Constitution.
  - A cooperative strategy was needed to forge the emerging Republican system, tying social groups with different political beliefs to care the Country's moral and economic renewal, quintessential to Italy's ongoing stability.
  - Stability, development and democracy in Kosovo: for the past 25 years, Italy has remained persistently committed to these principles, embodied in the role of our military personnel to KFOR mission, where Italy has expressed 13 out of 28 Commanders.
  - The Italian contingent now stands at 815 personnel, the largest one within KFOR force, and its numbers peaked at 1500 during the deployment of NATO reaction force battalion, between November 2023 and March 2024.
  - It is unfortunate that the local press and opinion leaders sometimes fail to give this significant investment the proper attention that it deserves. Actually, it is a priceless resource that has been supporting Kosovo in coping well the connected international dangers, mainly after Russian unprovoked war to Ukraine, as well as the unsolved regional and domestic challenges.
  - I have already got the opportunity to say that the Italian Government's stance has no ambiguity with regard to the multiple warnings issued in the last

months by Kosovar Authorities on the threats posed by an increased military presence along the northern borders.

- As part of the NATO-led mission, our Armed Forces will remain in place to uphold the stability and security of this Nation, in coordination with our allies and despite the risks to the safety of our personnel, as proven during May 2023 events in Zvecan, that resulted in numerous injuries among our soldiers. Nevertheless, it is crucial that all parties refrain from unilateral and uncoordinated actions to help de-escalate the tensions.
- Reaching lasting peace and reconciliation is a complex, multi-layered process, and the Dialogue facilitated by EU is still critical to achieve an agreement to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia.
- Building on the achievements of Ohrid and Brussels last year, Serbia is expected to fulfil its responsibilities under the Path to Normalization Agreement and to fully cooperate to bring those responsible for Banjska terrorist attack, who are currently residing in Serbia, to justice, facilitating their extradition to Kosovo, while Kosovo is requested to move on with the creation of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities, among other things.
- Italy will continue to back Kosovo in this crucial phase supporting its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and other international mechanisms, whether this will necessarily require a constructive approach.
- Mr. Prime Minister, despite the challenges, it has been another year of hard work to strengthen the bilateral ties in all strategic fields of economy, culture and education.
- On bilateral trade, Italy ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the EU and 6<sup>th</sup> worldwide, offering prospects for Italian companies to further expand their market share and exchange their invaluable knowledge and cutting-edge industry practices.

- I am glad to report that the negotiations for the Agreement on mutual recognition of driving licenses have been successfully concluded. We are now poised to sign this agreement in the near future.
- I firmly believe that culture serves as a powerful stimulant to promote people-to-people exchanges beneficial to bilateral relations.
- To enhance Italy's standing in Kosovo, strategic collaborations with both public & private local entities have been developed, as reflected in our steady support for the Chopin Piano Fest, Peja and Mitrovica Jazz Festivals, Dokufest, Mitrovica Guitar Fest, Kino Armata & Rame Lahaj Opera Festival, without forgetting the directly executed noteworthy artistic projects that have attracted major public interest, such as the "Sanremo Giovani World Tour" & the exhibits showcasing "Pinocchio" & "Paolo Rossi & Football Legends".
- To rise Kosovar people's familiarity with Italian language and culture, we have given RTK access to top-notch entertainment content, including TV series & documentaries, produced by our public media entity, RAI. And, to foster contact between the two major language communities, while respecting their own identities, Italian programs are simulcasted on RTK1 and RTK2 with Albanian and Serbian subtitles.
- To bolster Italian language education at the University level, together with UBT College, a center for Italian language certification will be soon established in Pristina; a noteworthy achievement that appeared impossible with other local partners until recently. Additionally, Italian MFA has just doubled the amount of scholarships for Kosovan students.
- On the bilateral assistance, Italy is sharing its expertise in mountain rescue and natural resource management to boost Kosovan tourism sector and generate local jobs in Peja, Decan, and Junik along the Via Dinarica and a new project focused on education & youth empowerment, named HoReCa, will

be carried out by supplying with equipment & specialized training in cuisine and hospitality the local Vocational Training Centers.

- Allow me to take a brief break from the institutional setting to convey my deep gratitude towards the medical staff of UCCK hospital for the first assistance and the one of the American Hospital for having provided all the necessary cures, chiefly Dr. Sabri Tmava & Dr. Arben Kojqiqi as well as my wife Miriam, for the compassionate care and support received during an extremely delicate phase of my health.
- I am grateful to the many Italian individuals serving in international organizations like EULEX, OSCE, U.N. agencies, humanitarian NGOs and particularly to my Embassy team, whose hard work made it possible to plan this reception and several of the aforementioned activities.
- I wish to express my gratitude for the generosity of our sponsors - ABI Carshia; Devolli Corporation; Fortesa Home; Oniks; Petrol Company; AMRE; Emona Group; ProCredit Bank; Emerald Hotel and Meridian Corporation - whose contribution enabled us to hold this party.
- To showcase the spirit of Italian cuisine, we have set up cooking stations where instructors and students from the prestigious “Tor Carbone” School of Hospitality Management, from Rome, will prepare delicious pasta dishes and desserts, while the chefs of KFOR Multinational Specialized Unit of the Carabinieri, whom we sincerely thank for their assistance, will pamper your palates with a selection of pizzas and lasagnas.

Mr. Prime Minister,

in a spirit of friendship and unity between our Nations, and with a shared vision for deepening our cooperation, I propose a toast to the prosperity of our Peoples and the wellbeing of all gathered here. CHEERS!!