

Draft Speech, ED Murra 20 February 2023

Dear Minister Xhaçka

**Honourable Ambassadors and Representatives of the
Diplomatic Corps,**

**Esteemed Experts, Panellists and Participants to the
Conference**

**Dear partners from the Japanese Embassy and the
International Visegrad Fund**

Distinguished guests

Dear friends of the Western Balkans Fund

Allow me to welcome you at the biggest advocacy event ever organised by the Western Balkans Fund, this important regional Conference in Tirana, focusing on women and leadership.

Unstoppable its WBF largest advocacy activity to date and as such, part of the mission, vision and objectives of our Fund.

At core, we are a grant-giving organisations, that in the last 5 years has funded 138 regional projects, creating a network of more than 5 thousand stakeholders and many dozens of thousand direct beneficiaries.

But, part of our growth is becoming bigger than our grants.

The unprecedented times we are living in, the aftermath of the Covid-19 Pandemics, the Russian Aggression on Ukraine, the cost of living crisis, bear all a disproportionate burden of Women.

This is why Unstoppable is dedicated first and foremost to them.

Through this Conference, we want to provide a platform for discussions to the relevant stakeholders on how to foster equal access to leadership in business, government, and non-profit organizations within the Western Balkans, Visegrad regions, and beyond and on how to tackle gender gaps and to promote human rights.

All with a view and focused on how these gaps impact the overall development processes in our regions.

In that regard, I sincerely appreciate the contribution of more than 50 distinguished speakers from both WBF, V4 regions, Japan and EU countries, including politicians, community leaders, civil society representatives, activists, regional experts.

To them should be added more than 100 participants, that will enable us to uncover the right skills in addressing any form of discrimination.

Together we will be able to deliver a more grounded and empowering message in regard to the translation of cross-cutting-edge leadership science into sustainable actions.

Speaking about our distinguished participants, I sincerely appreciate your presence. Many of you postponed or cancelled other meaningful professional engagements to be in Tirana with us.

On behalf of the Western Balkans Fund, I sincerely thank you for being here!

Deep appreciation to our WB6 Contracting Parties for the partnership and the ongoing support towards all of our important activities.

Dear Minister Xhaçka

We look forward with great excitement to the Tirana 2023 Chairmanship of the Western Balkans Fund. Once more, your presence here is a strong signal of the commitment of Albania towards the Region and the Equality Agenda.

Wholehearted gratitude to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is already the fourth inter-regional event that we have organised together and I am confident that this cooperation will only become stronger in the future.

I am sorry that the Ambassador Takada is not present, but the reason couldn't be stronger. The Prime Minister Rama visit to Tokyo is a very important event, which I sincerely hope will contribute to the strengthening of our ties between Japan, Albania and the Region.

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Many thanks to the International Visegrad Fund for this partnership and the help you have provided over many years. Dear Maja, thank you for being here. We are proud to be your partners in the Western Balkans region.

Many thanks also to Forum 2000 Foundation, that pursues the legacy of Vaclav Havel by supporting the values of democracy and respect for human rights, assisting the Unstoppable Conference.

Sincere gratitude to the Swiss Government. The core support provided to the Western Balkans Fund smoothens the path towards reaching our strategic objectives. Hosting such important advocacy events is one of those.

Thank you all, friends and partners, for believing in our noble mission.

The Japanese people have plenty of wise popular sayings. I would like to underline one: “Be not afraid of going slowly- be afraid of standing still”. It may take us many years to reach full parity by taking small steps towards progress. If we just choose to stand still, it will be eternity.

Dear friends,

We at WBF are confident that this Conference will trigger us to open the horizon, grasp new opportunities and contribute towards a better, common future.

By saying that I would really like to ask you for a round of applause for the real organisers of this Conference, starting from Dafina Beqiri,; Ksenija Vukmirovic and Fjordi, Urosh, Hanan, Klevis, Enea, Orgeta and Valbona.

Thank you