



DUA LIPA

KOSOVO

<https://youtu.be/aRL2VdFhNjs>

Wow. Good evening. Or, as we say in Kosovo, Mirëmbrema. Thank you, Damon, so much for your generous remarks. And thank you, Atlantic Council, you have been and continue to be a great friend to Kosovo, and it truly is an honor to be here to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary.

I'm humbled to share the stage with tonight's honorees: Dr. Bourla, Dr. Türeci, Professor Sahin. Thank you so much for everything that you've done to help us tackle the COVID pandemic.

Your Excellency, Ms. Von Der Leyen, thank you for your leadership. And I can only apologize for the sleepless nights my other country must have caused you during these long and painful Brexit negotiations.

I stand before you as a child of Kosovo, who was born and raised in the United Kingdom and is here today as a guest of the United States. I come from a place most of you will have heard of, but perhaps not in the way I'm about to describe. I want to share with you a little bit about my Kosovo.

Kosovans love to party, which is no surprise, perhaps as 50% of the population is under 25 years old. I'm officially old in Kosovo. I heard a story recently about a visitor that went to Pristina, the capital city of Kosovo, being kept awake until the small hours by a lively crowd at a bar opposite her hotel. The next morning, she asked at reception what the occasion was and they said, "That? Oh, that was just a Monday."

Pristina has a wonderful café culture. Forget grabbing coffee on the go. Dress sharp, pull up a seat, and watch the world go by. It's very European.

For a small country, Kosovo is bursting with creativity. And I could reel off examples, but here are just a few. Hive, a beautiful Kosovan film, took three major awards at this year's Sundance. Watch out for it at the Oscars. Pristina will also host Manifesta next year, which is a contemporary art and culture biennale. And that will see the city overtaken with public art exhibitions and installations. And journalists from highly respected publications speculate on what must be in the water to produce so many successful music artists.

All I can say is, give us a chance and we will excel. In 2018, my dad and I founded the Sunny Hill Festival in Pristina, and it quickly became one of the biggest music festivals in the region. It's been a lifelong

dream of ours to bring artists to Kosovo, not just so fans can see their favorite bands, but so that the visiting bands can experience our own brilliant and diverse music scene.

The second part of our dream will soon become reality. And I couldn't be more excited to share our plans for the Sunny Hill Foundation with you. We've signed an MOU to create the Sunny Hill Arts and Innovation Center in Pristina, and we very much hope that work will start next summer. Thank you. It will be a creative space where young people can learn about music production and performance. For those who want to break into the industry, there will be workshops run by visiting artists and producers from all over the world, who will share what they've learned. And for others, the center will be a place to build confidence, learn some skills, and most importantly of all, have some fun.

The first concert I ever went to was Method Man and Redman. It was in Pristina, and I was 13. It was a bit random, really cool, and definitely not quite age-appropriate. But it wasn't like I had any actual choice of shows. Kosovo is just too small a market to be included on most world tours. So now we bring artists to Kosovo. And without exception, everyone that we've invited to perform at the Sunny Hill Festival, from Miley Cyrus to Calvin Harris, is just blown away by the whole experience. They say it's one of the best shows they've ever done, as the energy is so roaring, the audience so present, and the welcome so sincere. The best performances are when you have that really great chemistry with the audience. And that somehow always seems to happen at Sunny Hill.

However, appearances can be also deceiving. In many ways, life in Kosovo is tough and it undeniably bears the scars of years of war. Even for those who mercifully escaped the war, it nonetheless leaves its legacy. My parents left Kosovo in 1992 as tensions were rising. While they were fortunate enough to make a good life in London, there were years when they knew they couldn't return home. That must have caused a pain that I can only imagine. Sometimes when I talk to my parents about this time, they can speak for hours. And other times, it's just too exhausting and they say they feel they've lived through 300 years.

For me, having this dual identity has actually been really positive. I'm always flattered when people comment on what they call my immigrant work ethic. It's true. It's a gift that's been passed down the generations. But even with a determined and bold national spirit, it takes time to recover and find a new footing.

Today Kosovo still faces many challenges, and often it's the young generation who bear the brunt of it. Young people struggle to find work, and their opportunities are hampered by restrictions that make it difficult to travel for work or pleasure. After we fulfilled all the criteria, the European Commission actually recommended visa liberalization for Kosovo for more than three years ago. So do you think we could get that done now? Or...

Kosovo is also the youngest country in Europe in another way. We are just 13 short years into our journey of independence. And as part of a strong international community, we will thrive emotionally, we will thrive economically and culturally. It's in our DNA.

While it still breaks my heart that the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union, rather than dwell on this, I would rather recall that the first purpose of the EU is to secure peace through unity. Wouldn't it be fitting if Kosovo could take its place within that peaceful union, thrive economically alongside our neighbors, and heal the hurt of recent conflict?

With that vision in mind... thank you. With that vision in mind, I accept this award with gratitude for all the young people of Kosovo. And to receive it on their behalf, I would like to invite Kosovo's own young leader, Her Excellency, President Vjosa Osmani, to the stage.

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