



We interviewed Mr. Dacic at a time when the Serbian public became quite upset over the signing of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), enabling NATO to transit the Serbian territory and to use Serbia's military installations. Mr. Dacic responds for "Sputnjik" to the question regarding the possibility of Serbia being a legitimate target, should the NATO forces be stationed in some of Serbia's barracks, while carrying out a military intervention.

- No. I think that this is totally wrong, a false piece of information. First of all, Serbia has its publicly declared decision, which was also adopted by the Parliament, i.e. the decision on our military neutrality. This signifies that Serbia cooperates with various military organizations, with NATO, among others, on the one hand, but also with the Collective Security Treaty Organization, on the other, too. We have no aspiration towards membership. In 2006, Serbia became a member of the "Partnership for Peace" programme. For instance, Russia, too, became a PfP member already in the early 1990s. One of the forms of PfP cooperation also included the harmonization of IPAP. In the same way Russia is involved in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), and all PfP members have signed a Status of Force Agreement, which enables the personnel of both sides to be accorded certain privileges and immunities, within PfP. This means that such an agreement exists if the matter at hand has to do with joint activities, military exercises, and not with any transit of NATO forces for the purpose of a military intervention, or of seizing any installations. This interpretation is absolutely wrong. Armenia has signed IPAP with NATO, and Armenia is a member of CSTO. Our media are, of course, full of headlines about our departure to Brussels, while none of them has reported on my visit to Dushanbe to attend the meeting of the CSTO Foreign Ministers' meeting. I presented each journalist with a photograph in the press conference, if they cannot publish it in the newspapers, they should keep it for personal reference. We want to cooperate with NATO, for NATO is an important factor of regional peace and stability here. When the Brussels Agreement was being signed, NATO i.e. KFOR emerged as a guarantor securing that certain armed forces of Kosovo will not reach the north, where the Serbs live, without the consent of KFOR. In this regard, the cooperation is important for us. There is also the science programme and the programme of cooperation in the area of emergency situations and Serbia has no intention to change its position vis-à-vis military neutrality.

How do you react to Boris Tadic's statement that one should think about full membership of NATO, despite the fact that he claimed, though while holding the office of President, that Serbia would not join NATO?

- That statement is very cynical because it was not made by someone who has never been in power. If this is what he really thinks, then Serbia should have acted like that all along from the start. And I remind you that he signed, among others, the framework agreement with NATO, he also signed SOFA with the United States, which is unilateral and specific, but unlike SOFA, Partnership for Peace is reciprocal. This means that we provide guarantees to them, while they guarantee nothing in return. This is what he signed with Condoleezza Rice. Throughout this entire stage, this pre-history, history and now the post-history of his Presidency, it is utterly unnecessary for him to advise anyone. The more so because the decision on military neutrality was made during his term-of-office.

How important is the Balkans for NATO? And why is it so important for the Alliance?

- If you asked NATO, their response would be that it is important in order to guarantee peace and stability in this way. On the other hand, as you know, we have no intention to join NATO, but having in mind that we are encircled by NATO from all sides, of course we want to establish partner relations. Therefore, I think that it is important to have a frank relationship with NATO. That implies that we have to be clear, as Minister Gasic and I were in Brussels, when we clearly said that "we have no aspirations whatsoever to join NATO". We have difficult and bitter experiences from the past, and when one of the Ambassadors from a member country of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization asked me what was really the main reason or obstacle for this public resentment of NATO, I told him that this has to do with our experiences from the past history. Our past, the bombing of Serbia- that must be the real reason that the citizens of Serbia have no positive attitude towards the membership of NATO. However, if we are statesmen, we must be aware that we cannot alter the past, and that we strive to protect, in the best possible manner, our national and state interests. Therefore, Serbia is pursuing a balanced foreign policy, for the treatment of NATO and CSTO is not only a military issue, but a political one, too. That is why we have our status in NATO, within the "Partnership for Peace" programme. I recall that, in the very building housing Missions to NATO, Russia and Serbia have offices next to each other. In the same way we are members of the Partnership for Peace, we are observers in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and in the Parliamentary Assembly of CSTO. We participate in their work when we are invited and we want to build the best possible relations.

But how sustainable is this neutral position of Serbia, having in mind all the circumstances that you have already mentioned. US Ambassador Kirby said recently that we are a schizoid nation, for our heart is turned to Russia, while our mind is looking to Europe.

I think it is viable. Serbia, and the former Yugoslavia, were always neutral. I am not aware that Switzerland ever lacked anything throughout its history, even though it has been neutral for two centuries now. In this regard, we are not, of course, neutral, in respect of different daily and political developments and geostrategic games, but we will do our best for our policy not to be based on an either-or approach, but on the policy that implies both the entry into the European Union, and the further development of good relations with Russia. We think that the two are not mutually excluding.

The NATO PA Rose-Roth Seminar was held here a few days ago. The topics featured, among other things, freedom of the media. At some point, the meeting literally turned into an orchestrated censure of Russia, as only representatives of the Baltic republics and Ukraine were taking the floor, while Russia was declared to be a country murdering journalists. When mention was made that in Serbia NATO killed journalists working for the national television, someone said that the remark was off the agenda, because many lost their lives at the time. Do you sometimes have a feeling that our hospitality was abused?

- Serbia has long been undergoing the trials of the double-standards policy, and we are often very sensitive to all these issues. When speaking about Ukraine, we cannot skip the issue of the territorial integrity of Serbia, having in mind that many Western countries have recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo. That is why we are trying to have a balanced relationship. You know, that is the very image of a situation that can also be seen in the sessions of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna. Almost each meeting there evolves in an atmosphere of mutual recriminations. The same goes for the sessions of the UN Security Council. Unfortunately, a crisis has been created in mutual relations in Europe and the world, and that is why one of the tasks of our Chairmanship is to find ways of restoring mutual trust. It is for this reason that we are nothing but pleased by the efforts of the Normandy Four aimed at the peaceful settlement of the problem in Ukraine. I have just talked to Sergey Lavrov in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in the meeting of CSTO, when he conveyed to me the joint position of Presidents Putin and Poroshenko, saying that they jointly want the OSCE Mission to be as active as possible, to have as many observers as possible, and to cover the largest territory possible. That, already, is a step forward, and if I may say so, after a series of bad news from Ukraine, there is another hint that we all realize that the crisis can only be resolved through political means, i.e. through negotiations.

How do you perceive this particular situation and the crisis, considering that, on the one hand, we have heard statements to the effect that some joint conclusions have been reached in meetings, no matter if they lasted all day and night, like the one in Minsk, while on the following day, one can hear accusations from Kiev that weapons have not been withdrawn, that heavy weapons are there, as well as the army, this and that... While we hear from Paris that Kiev is the one violating the agreement... To what extent can the OSCE have a clear picture and to what extent can it impact prevention of violations of agreements that abound?

- OSCE cannot prevent violation of the agreements. Role of the OSCE Mission is to verify the state of affairs. This means that the OSCE is taking note of the agreement violations, of whether weapons were withdrawn or not, of whether the ceasefire had taken hold... Moreover, what is currently most topical, and what I am discussing with representatives of the Normandy Four, is the formation of working groups, i.e. sub-groups within the Trilateral Contact Group, for, according to the agreement, four sub-groups are to be made. The first one would address security, the other would be in charge of political issues, the third one in the areas of the economy, the fourth one in charge of humanitarian actions.

Instances of ceasefire violation have been reported, there is a problem with the verification of

heavy weapons because these procedures are quite general, now it is required to implement these operationally, in practice. Sometimes, the parties do not want to observe all the procedures or they claim that that is not what was agreed. The role of the OSCE is to mediate among all, with the aim of coming up with the best solution. The task is not an easy one, but I have to say that Serbia, as the country holding the Chairmanship-in-Office, has facilitated the unanimous decision on extending the monitoring mission's mandate in Ukraine by one year. So far, the mission's mandate lasted for six months. Moreover, the decision included the increase in the number of observers to five hundred, with the possibility of the figure reaching one thousand. It also encompasses the procurement of technical means for monitoring the situation on the ground, including financial means. The funding of the mission.

Who is providing the funds for that?

- The mission is funded in two ways. A part comes from the budget of the OSCE, while the other comes from the so-called extra-budgetary funds, i.e. donations. We are now urging all countries to provide funding for the mission. Our advantage over others is that everyone used to be entrenched in their positions and that there were no possibilities of easier mediation, precisely due to this lack of trust.

We have so far had the situation when it was rumoured that Russia would not want the mission to be extended, upon which I called Mr. Lavrov, who told me that Russia agreed with it. That is how we overcame problems of this kind. Even today, we are being asked whether Russia actually disagrees with the heads of working groups permanently serving in that capacity, rather than being rotated, while Lavrov has not even mentioned the problem. Many of these problems actually amounted to a lack of good channels of communication.

It is for this reason we owe gratitude to Germany and France, for having launched this initiative, but the initiative is also part of the sincere commitment of both Presidents Poroshenko and Putin to move forward towards the peaceful settlement of problems. What's more, the idea of scheduling these meetings in Minsk was also accepted, Minsk previously not really being the preferred destination for those coming from the European Union.

To what extent does this true desire correspond to the constant conscriptions in Ukraine? Ukraine signs an agreement and then launches troop mobilization....

- I think that it should be regarded as a reflection of an internal situation, rather than as a situation in which someone dares, at this point, to spoil an agreement reached at the international level.

In my opinion, the stakes of the four leading signatories, Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France, backed by the UN Security Council and the OSCE are too high, for someone to come just like that and simply say that they won't comply with the letter of the agreement. Therefore, the general assessment is that, more or less, things in Ukraine are moving in the right direction and changing for the better.

Four leaders did sign the agreement, but the fifth one keeps sending weapons to

Ukraine. What does that mean? If we really want progress towards peace, why do we keep discussing war?

- I talked to US Secretary of State Kerry. He told me that America does not want a conflict, because it seeks de-escalation. On the other hand, the European Union, as well as the countries of Europe, have clearly pointed out that war is not a solution and that arms should not be sent to Ukraine, so I believe that it is just one of the possibilities, should the situation escalate further, but I also think that the United States has lent support to the Minsk Agreement. The Minsk Agreement is, actually, pivotal for the development of the political process, and I think that we should all do our best for it to be implemented.

It seems to me, having in mind the enormous demonization of Russia in the global media that this has not to do with Ukraine only.

- You know what, I believe that all these agreements are forged by the major world players. Therefore, I have no doubts regarding the implementation of the agreement.

Let us go back to our topics. In relation to Kosovo, you said once that many things were agreed on, and that a lot has been done, but whenever something is decided upon, the "drone syndrome" crops up, and we get back to square one. Besides, this was confirmed by the European Union. Mogherini comes to Serbia and says that "two independent states" are conducting the dialogue. How far have we got in the negotiations? At one point, the Prime Minister said that we've lost the least compared to what could have been lost under the circumstances, and won most of what could have been won. What, exactly, did we win, and what did we lose in these seven-year negotiations?

- Seven years of negotiations, yes. But the negotiations have not only lasted for seven years. They have been maintained for many long years, including the period of the Government of Vojislav Kostunica, at the time of the Rambouillet conference, etc. The problem lies with the fact that Serbia's situation aggravated by the passing of each day and year, for the factual state in Kosovo was such that it enabled, along with the support of some Western countries, the verification of the unilaterally declared independence. In this regard, Serbia is faced with very difficult trials. In other words, we need to seek, in this foreign-policy imbroglio where it is now, and which is related to Kosovo, the quickest and the shortest way out, with the least damage possible. In this sense, Serbia was virtually in a dilemma about its conduct and demands, in conditions when talks between Belgrade and Pristina are unwanted. Even this EU facilitation came at Belgrade's insistence... Let us be open and frank about it...

Yes, that was done by the then Government and President...

- Yes, at the outset, HR Catherine Ashton said that the talks are status-neutral. But there is a problem in the sense that in each of these meetings, Pristina is trying to hammer out, so to say, as much independence as possible. One of the situations we were faced with involved the problem of holding elections with ballot papers containing the coat-of-arm of "Kosovo". And so I thought to myself, do we have a coat-of-arms printed on our balloting slips in Serbia? I do not think so. But if someone lacks the legal recognition of independence, they would put their own

coat-of-arms on a bottle of mineral water. We were faced with all these problems. In these conditions, when it was clear that there was no progress in European integration unless progress in the dialogue be made, and aware, on the other hand, that the majority of EU countries have recognized the independence of Kosovo, but not the entire European Union, and that the talks are, still, status-neutral, our starting point was that it was most important to secure the best possible status and situation for the Serbian people living in Kosovo. The whole intention behind and gist of the Brussels Agreement was the establishment of the Community of Serbian Municipalities. It is for this reason that everything was done. However, we came to a situation that still, up to this day, we have not managed to define the Statute of the Community of Serbian Municipalities, because Pristina thinks that it should have the least jurisdictions possible, and it keeps blocking the adoption of the Statute. Implementation of the Brussels Agreement actually suits Serbia and Serbia is not the one halting the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, but Pristina. We have to continue to insist that the talks between Belgrade and Pristina be maintained in a manner recognized by the international community for talks on such situations under dispute. Unilateral actions cannot become legal, but it is a big question as to the extent to which we can push it home in some international organizations. In a situation where decisions are made by the majority of votes, we obviously cannot, because these organizations have already admitted Kosovo to their membership. In the United Nations, we first and foremost have the support of Russia and China, but also of many other large countries which understand that the problem lies with the legality of Pristina's unilateral act.

But the EU is now making the chief decisions.

- The European Union cannot make a decision on the independence of Kosovo, as long as there are countries that do not recognize Kosovo. On the other hand, the European Union cannot replace the United Nations. But it is within the European Union that we are maintaining the dialogue on all questions that are status-neutral, and that are supposed to signify the normalization of relations, but without the recognition of Kosovo on the part of Serbia. We have not changed our position and we will not change it.

We cannot defend our territorial integrity any less than Ukraine's territorial integrity, but the EU can refuse to admit us as long as we have no agreement with Kosovo.

- HR/VP Federica Mogherini apologized for that statement. She allegedly wanted to say that it has to do with parties, not countries. Now that our Prime Minister conducts negotiations with the new Prime Minister in Pristina, I hope that we will all together be able to make a few steps further. But not in the direction of independence, but the normalization of relations. Serbia is a constructive factor. And it is for this reason that I believe this matters. Serbia is no longer the country on the agenda of international fora. But at the same time, we cannot allow Serbia to defend its territorial integrity less than the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

President Nikolic said that Serbia would be joining the EU in a month, if it recognized Kosovo. What is your opinion on that? Would it?

- It would not. For there will always be new conditions.

But why, if we are doing everything that is requested from us?

- You know, when Mladic was handed over, the issue of Kosovo cropped up in a month's time. It had not been on the agenda earlier. However, we absolutely do not want to accept this policy of moving targets anymore, this permanent imposition of new conditions... And we do not want keep discussing this topic any longer. We clearly said, and we were clearly told, that there are no conditions whatsoever. Perhaps somebody would love that. Bilaterally, these countries have already recognized Kosovo, but Serbia has no intention to change its position regarding Kosovo. We believe that we are ready for dialogue, but we are not ready for the imposition of any conditions, or ultimatums.

Serbia is preparing for entry into the EU, and that begs the question of how the EU looks at the fact that Tsipras is coming to visit Serbia? His announced visit to Russia created a storm of resentment in Europe. Isn't it the way to tell us either that we should not invite Tsipras, who, it seems to me, like the picture of Dorian Grey, shows in a way what the EU really looks like in the eyes of the world?

- No, I don't think anyone is giving us any orders, and no one has any objections when it comes to Serbia's foreign-policy activities. We are a candidate country for EU membership. You know, when Tsipras can talk to Angela Merkel, why wouldn't he talk to our people here, with Mr. Vucic or President Nikolic?

They fear that Greece, Serbia and Macedonia might, though this is entirely hypothetical, form an anti-European coalition.

- We cannot be an anti-European coalition, we want to join the European Union.

And they are already in there...

- I had several situations while I served as Prime Minister and when I talked to some of my colleagues abroad, they would say to me: "Why do you need to join the EU, they are exploiters..." I always replied: "Let us join first, and then we'll see. If it doesn't work for us, we'll leave without a hitch.

Without a hitch is not an option. You have seen it for yourself.

- It is, they can always make the decision. But they will not. The problem is that Serbia, i.e. Yugoslavia, used to represent the West for Hungary, or the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, prior to their entry into the EU. We subsequently waged wars here, so today our GDP amounts to only 65% of the GDP in 1989. By contrast, they increased their GDP threefold or fourfold. And that is a fact.

There is no justice in international relations.

- You are wondering if there is justice in international relations. I stopped believing in international justice a long time ago. There is no such thing as complete justice. There are

double standards. What is applicable to great powers is not, unfortunately, applicable to our country, and in this context, Serbia... someone said that when two elephants are making love, the grass will be trampled, let alone when they make war.

In order not to be those media that pay no attention to CSTO, while seeing only NATO, I ask what CSTO means to us, and what NATO means to us. Do you perceive CSTO as a possible counterbalance to NATO? NATO is a military alliance, while CSTO is not, but it has a military component. What is our positioning in this situation?

- We maintain a position of neutrality and we want to have good relations with both. We also want to have good relations with the Shanghai Pact. Serbia does not want to form part of any military and political organization. Now that we are marking the 40th anniversary since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, I read the materials prepared for Tito's statement at the Helsinki conference. The commonest word uttered at the time, and the one that could be for a reason uttered today as well, is détente, i.e. the relaxation of tensions. We need tensions to be lessened. The relaxation must take place to prevent the situation from escalating into a full-blown-out war. And that is why I believe that the OSCE has not lost its relevance.

You have now reminded me of Mr Jeremic, who until recently sat in that armchair, and who also read old documents. Will you support him in his desire, if he runs for the new Secretary General of the United Nations?

- That decisions should be made by the Government. We will make the decision on whether Serbia will have its candidate in the first place, and who that might be, in consultation with the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic.

It would be a shame for Serbia not to have its own candidate, if there is a minimum chance for Mr Jeremic to become the Secretary-General.

- There is already a large number of candidates. As you know, there has never been a great deal of unity in the East-European group we belong to, which means that even as we speak some other parts of our planet are lobbying to get the position of Secretary-General, but that is a topic we are yet to discuss in the coming weeks and months, and the question will be resolved.

And the last, as they say, burning question. April and the reshuffling of the government. How do you see the government reshuffling? Where do you see yourself in the new government?

- Well, that is not a question for me. This is not a foreign-policy question. That is a question to be put to the Prime Minister. Everyone is familiar with my position, I am not in favour of frequent changes and frequent elections and the Prime Minister knows that, too. He often jokes with me on that account. I think that Serbia needs political stability. On the other hand, the Prime Minister has the right, and depending on the need, he might use this opportunity to add impetus for a better-quality work of the Government. In what way and when that will be done remains for the Prime Minister to decide, for he has put together this whole coalition. We have had and we

still have good cooperation. In the foreign-policy sector, I believe that we had no points of disagreement and problems whatsoever, but the most important thing is the belief in the common goal that has brought us all together- we want Serbia to be better, and we want our people to live in the way they deserve- I will believe in this goal, regardless of whether I will be in the Government or not.