



High-Level Political Forum of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, 7 July 2014.

Statement by FDPM and MFA Ivica Dacic

"Esteemed Mr. President of the UN General Assembly,
Mr. President of the Economic and Social Council,
Mr. United Nations Secretary-General,
Dear fellow Ministers,
Excellencies,

I have the distinct honour and pleasure to participate in the session of the High-level Political Forum of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, of which Serbia became a member after more than two decades. I would also like to emphasize the importance of the high-level political Forum on sustainable development being held within a reformed Economic and Social Council. The aim of the ECOSOC reform, as the most important UN body in the economic, social, and environmental areas, is that it faces the challenges of our planet and accumulated economic, social and environmental problems, whose consequences we are all exposed to, in a more engaged, more efficient and direct way. As a new ECOSOC Member State, Serbia wishes to make a full and active contribution to this aspiration.

Mr. President,

Negotiations concerning the formulation of post-2015 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals, where Serbia actively participates as a member of the Open Working Group, represent one of the major strategic tasks the UN is faced with, and will lay foundations of sustainable development for the first half of the XXI century. When formulating development goals, it is necessary to take care of the respect of general principles, primarily the principle of universality, for the goals should be applicable to all countries; furthermore, the principle of comprehension - every adult and child whose future is concerned must find the goals comprehensive, and finally- goals must also be measurable- all the countries have to apply the same methodology of measuring the implementation of goals from the post-2015 Agenda, for the results reached in such manner are the only ones that lend themselves to comparison.

Definition of goals and sub-goals of sustainable development for the post-2015 period is in its final stage. Eradication of poverty is clearly its crucial goal, but the goals of inclusive education,

health, gender equality, sustainable energy and particularly of sustainable economic growth and decent work for all, as well as other goals and sub-goals, are equally important. Goals related to climate change permeate all other goals and are at the core of the Development Agenda. However, the question is how these goals will be implemented and in what way they will be funded.

The Republic of Serbia actively participates in the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Goals Financing. We fully observe the principle stemming from Monterrey Conference on Sustainable Development Financing - specifying that every country is primarily responsible for its own development and that every country should primarily implement necessary reforms aimed at establishing an efficient tax system, good governance and eradication of illicit financial flows. The Government of the Republic of Serbia has undertaken serious reform steps precisely in this direction. Official development assistance, however, remains a most important instrument, particularly when it comes to the least developed countries. When the global economy is being transformed, it is evident that the private financial flows and public-private partnership should find their place. Every country has the responsibility to create an atmosphere conducive to direct investments, both in terms of private capital and sovereign funds.

Mr. President,

The fact is that the world has changed dramatically over the last 15 years and that some developing countries recorded significantly higher growth rates than developed countries. Nevertheless, at the same time, a billion of people, chiefly from the least developed countries, small island states and landlocked countries, still live under conditions of extreme poverty. Inequality and imbalance still prevail in the world, both inside and among the states.

When it comes to fulfillment of the goals defined by the Millennium Declaration, Serbia has achieved its basic goal and managed to cut the number of the poor by half until 2008. Death rates of infants, children and mothers have decreased, and the rate of completion of compulsory education is still high. Unfortunately, the situation has aggravated during the global financial crisis. Reports on unemployment and poverty rates are on an ascending line. A marked development imbalance between the residents of urban and rural areas, the capital and other areas, particularly the south of the country, is still noticeable in Serbia. As a middle-income country, Serbia is faced with specific developmental challenges in poverty eradication.

Difficult economic situation is also burdened with a high number of refugees and internally displaced persons. These vulnerable groups present one of the largest issues Serbia is faced with. Serbia ranks first in Europe both regarding the number of refugees- 42 000 from Croatia and 16 000 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the number of internally displaced persons- 200 000 from Kosovo and Metohija. Finding a durable and sustainable solution for these vulnerable groups remains one of the major tasks of the Government. Unfortunately, there are still serious obstacles for the return of refugees to the country of origin, particularly having in mind the increasingly frequent ethnically motivated incidents and hate speech. Therefore, we are deeply concerned over the premature adoption of the UNHCR Recommendations of April 2014 on the collective cessation of refugee status concerning persons expelled from Croatia from 1990 to

1995. Out of 200 000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, less than 5 % returned to their homes from 1999 onwards.

Mr. President,

I recall that the concept of sustainable development was first formulated in 1987 in the Brundtland Commission Report which then noted the following:

"Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The relevance of this thought is more topical today than ever before. It is the crucial task of the international community facing the challenge of intensive climate change and the core issue of sustainable development. Natural catastrophes, which are the result of climate change, did not unfortunately pass by the region of South-East Europe and Serbia this year. With an average of 100 disasters in 10 years from the beginning of the 19th century, the number reached as many as 2,800 disasters in 10 years at the late 20th century. Unprecedented floods that affected Serbia in May this year, when a three-day rainfall corresponded to an average rainfall of a three-month period, caused casualties and flooded several dozens of municipalities. More than one million eight hundred thousand people were endangered, over 30,000 persons were evacuated. There was a greater number of landslides, a significant part of infrastructure was damaged, serious damage was caused to agriculture. The flooding affected 75 000 to 80 000 hectares of agricultural land. So far, over 522 tons of dead animals have been collected and disposed of. According to the preliminary data, the damage caused by floods that have recently hit parts of Serbia amounts to EUR 1.5 billion. I take this opportunity to express once again my gratitude to the UN and its Member States for the prompt delivery of humanitarian aid and for the engagement of its teams to assess the damage caused by catastrophic floods. Without the generous bilateral assistance and the support of the UN, we would not be able to help all the citizens who desperately needed help.

The activities to alleviate the effects of natural disasters are the imperative of our time. An urgent development of a system to adapt to climate change is necessary and the establishment of mechanisms for reducing risk from natural disasters. We must act immediately. If measures are not taken in order to limit the rise of global temperature to two degrees centigrade maximum, there is a real danger that the extreme weather conditions, caused by climate change will be even more intensive the future.

The Summit on Climate Change in Paris in 2015 is crucial. In Paris, we must not experience failure, particularly because the vulnerable population groups of the poor, the elderly, children, people living in remote areas are the most affected by the consequences of climate change.

The effects of natural disasters inevitably worsen the fragile economic situation in all parts of the world and in the SEE region and make the fight to reduce poverty more difficult, which remains the core issue of our time. Apart from the results achieved in the realization of the Global Millennium Goals, it is a matter of concern that the success in eradicating poverty is uneven and that there are regions with no recorded success.

To conclude, I wish to underscore that the Republic of Serbia highly appreciates the readiness of the international community to organize the International Donors' Conference, in Brussels, on 16 July, at the invitation of the European Commission, France and Slovenia, where donors will be presented with the Report on the assessment of damage caused by floods in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2014, based on the EU, UN and World Bank analyses. Serbia attaches great significance to the success of this Donors' Conference, and I take this opportunity to invite you to take part in it.

Thank you for your kind attention!"

{youtube}1DyuQxuaAB0{/youtube}