



Address by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the 15th Serbian Economic Summit held in Belgrade:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the Government,
Madam Deputy Prime Minister,
Fellow Ministers,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Srpska,
Excellencies,

It is my particular honour to participate, this year again, at the Economic Summit, deeply convinced that our today's exchanges would give an additional impetus to the development of stability, mutual cooperation, and consequently, to the economic progress not only of the Republic of Serbia, but of the entire region as well.

The Republic of Serbia is willing and stands ready to continue with the implementation of reforms needed for the further transformation of the state and the society. In this context, Serbia attaches highest priority to the creation of a State based on the rule of law, as the prerequisite for attracting foreign investment, along with activating a small- and medium-size entrepreneurship in the country.

I must underline that, since our last meeting, a significant portion of what has been envisaged in our programme has been carried out. I wish to recall that, in this Government's one year of office, 576 million euro has been invested in Serbia, creating 7,437 new jobs. As our Prime Minister emphasized, 62 projects are in the pipeline, whose implementation would ensure almost a billion euro worth of investments, over the next few years.

This Government's priority is to lay foundations and provide adequate conditions for an as intensive as possible economic growth and employment of young people in particular, fiscal consolidation, public enterprise restructuring, rationalization and greater effectiveness of public administration, enhancement of social security, education and health. The country is facing the problem of low birthrate, aging population and growing emigration.

As regards our foreign policy activities, focus is on further strengthening of the international position and reputation of the Republic of Serbia. Significant results have been achieved over the past year, both in regional cooperation and intensification of dialogue with countries world-wide.

A clear affirmation of the strengthening of our foreign policy position is apparently our OSCE Chairmanship, pursued under highly complex international circumstances, and where Serbia

acts responsibly and impartially in establishing viable peace and in seeking durable solutions. Serbia's distinct position is that outstanding issues can be resolved solely through an open and continued dialogue, thus contributing to the establishment of a stable, economically connected and fully cooperation-oriented region. I believe that all of us in the region are aware that only by working and acting together will we be able to make specific steps forward in cooperation, which will primarily have a positive impact upon our citizens.

Opening of accession negotiations with the European Union is a historic opportunity and our essential strategic commitment. The Serbian Government is fully focused on this goal and is ready to complete the accession negotiations by the end of its term, in 2018. We expect that, in those circumstances, Serbia could become a full-fledged EU Member State by 2020.

The European perspective is the key factor that has enabled success of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The success of this dialogue has demonstrated, on the one hand, that the policy of enlargements continues to be a strong driving force for the Western Balkans and, on the other hand, affirmed the EU as an international factor capable of addressing outstanding issues, thus making a crucially important contribution to the expansion of stability and security. In the dialogue conducted so far, Belgrade has signed in the past few months, the agreement on legislation, adopted a legislation implementation plan, reached agreements on civil protection and municipal budgets, whereas Serb representatives returned to the Parliament and the Government in Pristina. Under the 15-point Brussels Agreement, Belgrade fulfilled all of its commitments. Six points relating to the Serbian community have not been implemented. Serbia wishes to have discussions concerning the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija.

We have always been ready for these talks as it is an existential issue for us, because we see the Community of Serbian Municipalities precisely as a mechanism that will ensure protection of the rights of Serbian people living in KiM.

It seems to be clear to everyone that we should not expect from the EU and its institutions, any relaxation in the context of meeting the membership criteria. Serbia is ready for deepening its cooperation to the effect of accelerating European integration in the region. At the same time, we consider it important that, along that road, everyone should progress in accordance with their own merits, without the imposition of a uniform pace.

Regional cooperation, enhancement of neighbourly relations and continuation of the policy of reconciliation are among Serbia's foreign policy priorities carried out through active participation in many regional initiatives, fora and processes. Successful and developed regional cooperation is a significant contribution to the strategic foreign policy priority of the Republic of Serbia – its EU membership.

When major world corporations look at investment opportunities, they see and analyze the region as a whole.

It is therefore the common interest of all of us in Serbia and the Western Balkans to successfully implement reforms aimed at establishing effective economic systems enabling a higher standard of living and better quality of life in general. This is apparently not possible without infrastructural connectivity on the regional level; therefore EU support to the implementation of infrastructural projects aimed at regional connectivity in transport and energy sectors is very important, as it will contribute to making the region more attractive for investments.

In this context, we welcome the announcement of the European Commission to allocate, from 2014-2020, one billion euro from IPA funds to infrastructural projects for six IPA beneficiaries in the Western Balkans, as well as its intention to attract by 2020, through joining European funds and those of financial institutions, private capital that would ensure funding of infrastructural

projects in the Western Balkans in the amount of not less than 10 billion euro.

I am deeply convinced that it is necessary to engage all our potentials, including diplomacy, in order to protect state economic interests, enhance the economy, as well as to intensify economic relations with other countries. Therefore, we will devote particular attention to reach this objective in the coming period.

Distinguished participants,

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your deliberations.”