



Address by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ilica Dačić at the ceremony of laying the cornerstone for the construction of refugee apartments in Kikinda, within the framework of the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme in the Republic of Serbia, under Sub-Project 2.

"Ladies and gentlemen,
Friends and participants of the Regional Housing Programme,

We have gathered here in Kikinda to officially mark the beginning of the construction of 25 new apartments for refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the framework of Sub-Project 2 of the Regional Housing Programme. As you know, I am very pleased to attend – whenever my commitments allow me – the marking of events within the framework of the Regional Housing Programme, while endeavouring to keep up with the dynamics, which has been a challenging task over the past year. I am proud of this, and honoured to be part of the project addressing issues of such importance to the life of people, and providing accommodation to those who well deserve it – the most seriously affected refugees from Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

May I look back to the period behind us, in order to recall everything that we have accomplished so far. This year will mark six years since the Donor Conference was held in Sarajevo, where

donors pledged to grant funds for the implementation of the Programme. With the assistance of bilateral donors and those of the international community, and thanks to the painstaking efforts of our national institutions, mechanisms have been developed towards the Programme's full implementation. In 2017 alone, I participated in many events marking the beginning of the construction of apartments at several locations – Sremska Mitrovica, Paraćin, Kruševac, Prokuplje, Vršac and Stara Pazova, as well as distribution of construction material. With undisguised pleasure, I would like to inform you that the construction of apartments at all locations is making very good progress. I said pleasure, because that is exactly how I feel, knowing how much has been done and achieved so far, enabling all of us together to accommodate and provide housing for refugee families from the wars of the 1990s, who are in greatest need. Successful RHP implementation demonstrates that those who have been in a difficult protracted refugee situation for more than twenty years, have not been forgotten. I particularly wish to thank all these families for their patience and understanding, sending out a message, at the same time, to those who are still waiting, that they will not be forgotten either. I would like to remind you of what I have already repeated many times, that Sub-Project 2 is worth in excess of 13 million euro and that it includes the construction of 200 apartments in nine local self-government units, 120 pre-fabricated houses, purchasing of 250 village houses and distribution of 330 packages of construction material. This totals 900 housing solutions. The apartments will be delivered to the beneficiaries on lease, with buy-up option at preferential rates after a period of six months, under the Refugee Law.

I wish to thank in particular the Mayor of Kikinda, Mr. Pavle Markov, because this municipality has signed several contracts within the framework of the Regional Housing Programme, including, in addition to apartment construction, buy-up of village households and distribution of construction material.

Besides providing housing, I also attach importance to the sustainability of the Programme, that is, to infrastructure, social and economic conditions for the integration of these people, where a crucial role is played also by their environment, particularly in smaller villages.

I trust and believe that, as direct Programme beneficiaries whom I wish to thank for their patience, you will be able to accomplish your life goals in this prosperous municipality, and I wish you success, joy and progress in your new dwellings.

As President of the Commission for Coordination of Permanent Refugee Integration, I would like to assure you that we have keen understanding for the grave situation of displaced persons, and that we have demonstrated a more humane approach to the resolution of this vital problem, than many other countries.

The safety and improvement of the situation of the accommodated Programme beneficiaries make it incumbent upon us to continue the activities towards the successful implementation of the entire programme. I am confident that this year will be marked by many more achievements, like the recent completion of 235 apartments, which we marked in Ovča, last February.

I would like to thank you all for accepting the invitation to attend our today's event and for continuing to follow and give your support to the Programme."