

Thursday, 23 August 2018.

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Address by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at a reception given on the occasion of the visit of members of the delegation of the International Committee of Slavists:

"Esteemed academics,  
Distinguished scientists,  
Dear guests,

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to play host to the participants of the XVI International Congress of Slavists held in Belgrade, from 20 -27 August, here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia which had supported the event from the very beginning when we presented our candidature to host the Congress. The fact that Belgrade is hosting such a major scientific meeting, both for Slavonic and Serbian studies, best illustrates the importance the Serbian academic community attaches to the International Congress of Slavists.

Although Belgrade had been elected to host the 3rd Congress back in 1939, it did not take place as the Second World War broke out and because of the solidarity with the occupied Slavic peoples. Today, against the background of different international circumstances, we have an opportunity to review the challenges currently facing the Slavic languages, primarily due to the globalization process, and development and application of information technologies imposing the Anglo-Saxon linguistic pattern as a dominant and indispensable one. The political and economic crises that engulfed the European continent like migration, within the European Union, as well as large migratory flows from the Middle East and Northern Africa, have raised grave concern among European nations about the survival of their demographic and cultural heritage. The crises have not by-passed the Slavic-language scientific community, either.

The situation in the Balkans is further complicated by the continuing process of Serbian language fragmentation, where political and statehood reasons are used to justify transposition of the unique common language corpus and creation of new language variations, acquiring different national/state characteristics on the political level, and frequently building their identity through the denial of their linguistic original. Due to the fact that the United States of America focused their fight for independence from the British Empire on political, territorial, economic liberation, without denying for a moment their English language or having no aspirations to turning it into American language, today - the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia

and New Zealand not only speak the same language but see the world and its phenomena with the same eyes. Can we say that the common language is the bond keeping these countries politically on the same side? Would not the correct linguistic perception of the area of Shtokavian and Ijekavian dialects, taken by Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic as the basis for the Serbian language reform, including significant parts of today's Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, be helpful for properly understanding the destiny of the Serbian people - divided for centuries between two mighty empires, different religious and political systems – many of whom have lost their religious but not linguistic, identity. As a result, the medieval literature of Dubrovnik, Kotor and Perast, and other coastal towns contains information about Serbs of Roman Catholic faith, celebrations of the Nemanjics Kingdom as their own cultural and political stronghold, painful memories of the Battle of Kosovo, and slain Serbian heroes. Myths, legends, epic ballads that became the bulwark of oral literature were passed down from one generation to the next, thanks to the common language that became the mainstay to preserve collective identity. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Serbian literary corpus also embraces writers of Mohammedan faith, who wrote their works in the Serbian language, thus sealing their identity through affiliation. Despite multiple attempts to classify writers by their geographic/territorial origin, parallel with the process of creating new language varieties, this has not become a practice, because the language, themes, historiographic data and cultural models used for their works enabled them to become a lasting segment of the Serbian cultural code.

Famous scientist Ludwick Fleck conveyed the essence by saying that we look at the world with our own eyes, but see it through the eyes of collectivity, and the eyes of that collectivity are its language; therefore, any manipulation with affiliation carries a potential danger.

An additional problem is the ever growing marginalization of the use of the Cyrillic script, justified by the universality of the Latin alphabet, which disregards the threat of moving away from our own linguistic/traditional roots, thus undermining national cultural identity, for good. Negligence of this sort can cause an irreparable harm, demonstrating that all the efforts of our ancestors who made great sacrifices to defend their language, national and religious identity, were in vain. This is where I see the responsibility of the linguistic scientific community, and you Slavists in the first place, who must defend truth and science by corroborating, unbiased methods.

Dear friends,

The holding of the 1st Congress of Slavists in Prague in 1929 was the result of significant social changes in Europe. The outbreak of World War I, collapse of four empires and, on the one hand, liberation of the Slavic peoples, creation of national states of Slav peoples, and on the other, the emergence of communism, imposed an obligation to study and position Slavic languages differently. Likewise, against the backdrop of a new reshaping of the European region, establishing a supranational entity, declaratively, with equal rights for all states, including in the use of their languages, the question arises as to whether, in practice, equal rights are accompanied by equal opportunities. Greater visibility of Slavonic cultures and particularly an adequate approach to younger generations would ensure better understanding of the role and importance of Slavic peoples throughout history, though they were almost always divided by

great power geostrategic interests and culturally marginalized, more often than not.

The marking of 200 years of the Serbian Dictionary by Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic offers an opportunity to draw attention to his great reform work and significance. Language standardization through definition of grammatical rules and collection of a language glossary enables studying of the respective language, its translation and communication with foreigners. This segment of Vuka Karadzic's work is, therefore, invaluable. Exceptional works of Serbian literature, mostly folk literature, have become accessible to European public at large. Thus, it is not surprising that a great writer like Goete was impressed by Serbian oral literature, whose literary/artistic expression exceeded the limits of folk creative production.

Consequently, as a universal asset of every nation, language is a cultural treasure of a nation, guardian of its uniqueness and the foundation of its national identity. It is, therefore, not irrelevant which language we speak, which language our children will speak, and how extensively and where a language will be studied.

I firmly believe that bringing leading world Slavists together, a lively exchange of ideas and experiences, reviewing the performance in between the two congresses and what needs to be done in the coming years is the right way to jointly overcome the challenges facing Slavonic studies in the present-day world.

I hope that you had a pleasant and fruitful stay in our town, over the past three days, and that you will leave with fresh ideas and plans. Although this is surely not the first visit to Belgrade for most of you, I hope you will have good new impressions, encouraging you to come again.

I now invite you to visit the Serbian Diplomacy Museum. We are proud that, among prominent diplomats, you will find those who left an indelible mark in world and Slavonic literature, such as Andric, Ducic, Rakic, Nusic, and many others who have prompted many young people to decide to embark on Serbian language studies.

Thank you for your attention."