



Address by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic in Berlin, at an event on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of registration of Berlin's International Business Community "Berlin Economic Talks", in the panel discussion on "The Western Balkans in Europe – opportunities and challenges":

"Esteemed Mr. Becker,
Esteemed Mr. Harms,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Becker for his kind invitation, offering me an opportunity to speak before this prominent audience and express the positions of the Republic of Serbia concerning the challenges facing our region, as well as its insights and specific proposals to overcome them.

The Republic of Serbia seeks to pursue a proactive, clearly profiled and conceived foreign policy, contributing to its better positioning on the regional, European and broader international level. The preservation of regional stability and focusing of all countries on ever more intensified cooperation in all areas are of essential interest to the Republic of Serbia, as it enables its own sustainable development. Accordingly, the promotion of good-neighbourly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation is condition sine qua non of Serbia's overall foreign policy.

Serbia strongly believes that the EU constitutes the best framework for all countries of the region, which will facilitate the achievement of individual interests of each of these countries. There is considerable complementarity in the processes of European integration, strengthening of regional cooperation and internal reforms in the Western Balkans countries. The European perspective of the Western Balkans has had a substantial impact on the promotion of regional cooperation, and has contributed to addressing many outstanding problems through dialogue. However, the migration crises, the unknowns brought about by "Brexit", and the dilemmas opening the discussions concerning the EU's future are unprecedented challenges for the European Union, but for our region, too. There are no simple and straightforward solutions to challenges anywhere in the world, and Serbia believes that the only appropriate direction overcoming them is through strengthening mutual ties and focusing on what brings us together rather than what keeps us apart. That is the "winning combination" for each country individually, but also for the region as a whole.

In its relations with neighbours and regional countries, Serbia is committed to the promotion of the "positive agenda", oriented towards the future and seeks in its relations with all regional countries to focus on the development of economic and other forms of mutually beneficial cooperation. In our assessment, this could contribute to creating a more favourable overall climate in the region, thus facilitating resolution of issues accumulated from the past.

It was for these reasons that Serbia strongly supported the German initiative for launching the so-called Berlin Process, and participated with strong commitment in all Berlin Process activities. The Republic of Serbia considers the Connectivity Agenda as one of the key pillars of the entire "Berlin Process, our mutual regional cooperation, and cooperation with EU Member States constituting a part of the Berlin Process, and the EC, too. I would like to single out several results achieved within the Berlin Process framework: the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation (RYCO) seated in Tirana, modelled on the German-French example, conclusion of the Treaty Establishing of the Transport Community in the SEE, seated in Belgrade, whose work is expected to begin by the end of this year, and the establishment of the Chamber Investment Forum (CIF) of the Western Balkans, seated in Trieste, representing the interests of 350,000 companies.

The readiness for cooperation expressed by the Republic of Serbia in the development of regional transport infrastructure is yet another way of demonstrating our commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in the region. In this context, the construction of Nis-Merdare-Pristina-Tirana-Drac motorway is one of our key priorities. In the coming period, the focus will be laid on the implementation of other infrastructural projects, like reconstruction and modernization of Nis-Dimitrovgrad, Belgrade-Budapest, Belgrade-Nis and Belgrade-Bar railways, and the completion of the Belgrade bypass, that is, the works on the Sava and Danube rivers as major navigable waterways, whose construction requires relevant funding. In addition, the development of a regional Study on the hydro-power potential is underway. As regards regional economic projects, we believe that, in the coming period, it is necessary to focus attention, among other things, on the following themes: establishment of joint border checkpoints within the framework of the CEFTA region and joint use of equipment for border control of goods; establishment of an "on-line" import-export system, assisting institutions in Serbia and other CEFTA parties to carry out all (or almost all) export-related procedures electronically; strengthening of the e-commerce system in the region by defining rules and enhancing participant security. All these proposals are directly related to Digital integration.

The reason for referring to these projects and initiatives is the desire to underpin your interests for cooperation towards their implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to note that Germany is one of Serbia's major economic partners, and one of the largest investors in Serbian economy. The Republic of Serbia wishes to further enhance and deepen its economic ties with Germany, as we are confident that in these areas in particular it is possible to achieve even better results, in due course.

In January-July 2018, the overall commodity exchange between the two countries totalled 2.83 billion euro. Serbia's exports to the FR of Germany were 1.15 billion euro, while imports amounted to 1.68 billion euro, whereas in 2017 the trade in goods between the two countries exceeded 4 billion euro, for the first time, totalling 4.34 billion euro, indicating a 10.3% rise

compared to 2016, when the overall exchange was 404.3 million euros, totalling some 3.94 billion euro. I would further like to underscore that more than 400 companies with German capital are doing business in Serbia, employing about 47,000 workers.

I am convinced that such impressive results and positive experiences of your business people will also encourage you who are here today to seriously consider business in Serbia.

On its path to full EU membership, Serbia has carried out a series of reforms in the economic field, but also in the areas of the rule of law, operation of state and local administration bodies, digitalization, etc. Serbia has thus created highly favourable conditions for business and investment by foreign companies in Serbia. The best evidence that such policy has proved to be successful is reflected in the data on foreign trade between our two countries and the number of German companies operating and investing in Serbia that I have just brought to your attention.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to visit Serbia and assure yourselves that we are ready to offer highly favourable business conditions, while we have an essential interest in increasing German investments in infrastructural projects, cooperation in automotive industry and energy, agricultural/ food-processing sector, IT and tourism. I hope that this meeting will result in your decision to become part of an impressive German business community in Serbia.

Thank you for your attention."