



First Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic took part in the two-day conference on the Western Balkans in Vienna.

The Serbian Foreign Minister spoke at a press conference after the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Western Balkan countries. The Foreign Ministers of Germany, Austria and Macedonia, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Sebastian Kurz and Nikola Poposki, and Commissioner for Enlargement of the European Union Johannes Hahn held a news conference.

“Dear colleagues, I am pleased that the Berlin process exists, namely that the idea of the European Union having to pay attention to the Western Balkans lives on, and that the follow-up meeting is taking place in Vienna and will take place in France and Italy in the coming years until we all become full EU members.

I would like to warn you, though, that the situation is not as idyllic as we might wish to present it. While having great appreciation for this initiative, I would like to invite all of us who make the Western Balkans not to act in accordance with the fact that once a year we talk about the future, and then revert to the past.

As you saw in the last months there have been many problems in the relations between the Balkan countries. There was a lot of strong language and therefore I think it is very important to show everyone that we can work in normal conditions, not only at conferences like these. A large degree of unity, mutual respect and love will probably be demonstrated at today’s conference but it will last until the first next problem we have with each other arises. And we have them not only in the Western Balkans, but also with the EU Member States and we must be aware of it.

We have witnessed in recent months a migration crisis, and this is not just about refugees and migrants, but about the exodus of people, and Serbia is among the transit countries for migration. After all different routes we have been faced with in our territory, we have now become part of the Western Balkan route when it comes to migrants.

When I became the Minister of Interior in 2008, the number of asylum applications was 77, and today 94,000 asylum applications have been filed in Serbia this year. The majority of migrants enter the territory of Serbia from Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece, and do not express intention to apply for asylum, and it is clear that Serbia is just a stop-over on their way to Western Europe. Most often they want to continue through Hungary, which is why Hungary has decided to build up the wall. Building of 174 km-long fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border is in

progress. We consider that it cannot be an adequate response to migration challenges. This must be clear, what Nikola Poposki and I can say, that migrants are coming to our countries from the EU. So, we are asking you when will you establish clear controls and how will you prevent migrants from the EU to enter Serbia. And it will not be solved with one million euros you intend to allocate for these purposes. It is the problem that you are facing, but, in parallel, we are asked to make an action plan for migrants. First of all, you have to make one yourselves. As we are friends, I am going to be honest with you. As you in Europe do not have such an Action Plan, then we will bear the greatest burden. That is what we must also be aware of. In Europe we are faced with building walls. Mr. Hahn and I officiated yesterday's football game and let it be his and your task to urgently open negotiations for Serbia's EU membership.

Progress has been made in implementing the agreements reached in Brussels, and there is no need to wait until January or for any other date next year. You can react promptly and open up our perspective instead of erecting a fence at the frontier and therefore fencing up Serbia and leaving it outside Europe. What will be the political message sent to us who will remain outside the fence?

I would like to warn you once again that the conference originally scheduled for September, but which will actually be held in October, is dramatically running late in relation to the problems we are facing. There are great expectations for the Conference as it includes the security context issue. There are forced population movements and migrants who face their own problems. The artificially induced crisis that befell their countries is not their fault. I am not sure that all those responsible for the worsening situation in their countries share an equal burden in addressing the migration issue. It is easy to create problems in other parts of the world but we are the ones who pay the price for it. Serbia and Macedonia are certainly not responsible for the situation in those countries. We bestow the greatest possible hospitality to those people and it will remain so, but I wish to recall that around 2,000 migrants cross the border between Serbia and Macedonia on a daily basis. I also wish to recall something that you have already forgotten. Another 44,000 refugees have been located in Serbia since the last war. There are also 220,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija and that is 260,000 persons in total plus this number of 100,000 who are here today. The migrants will leave, but those displaced persons, refugees from Kosovo and Metohija will not return there. So, give some consideration to this as well. The population numbers in Kosovo and Metohija must go back to those before they left. The number of 200,000, actually 220,000 persons left KiM after 1999 and a mere 1.9 percent of them returned. We have more than one migration crisis on our hands, refugee crisis, and we cannot deal with the current situation alone, because it would not be fair on our own people.

We do wish to be stakeholders in everything. I believe that 19 October as the date you set for the Conference to take place is far-off. I have to warn you that we are faced with a serious economic situation in Serbia and Macedonia, which is far worse from the one experienced in your countries. The way of solving economic issues cannot certainly be the same in one country or the other, or a third one. But we will meet our commitments even if you fail to give us the money, because it is our responsibility as human beings. I would like to ask you to bring some other countries from our region on board as part of this process as well, even the ones associated with the Berlin Initiative. Greece should and must be part of this Initiative because,

among other things, it is itself part of the migration route, and so are Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. But Greece in the first place.

We are certainly most grateful that you take care of the Western Balkans and it seems that if this Conference was not held this year, after all those stings that we directed at each other, the spirit of unity would have been lacking. And only problems would be on the agenda and different anniversaries that take us back into the past and instead of moving us forward they pull us back even more. While Germany and France and other Western countries, 10 years after WWII, started to build the European Union, we are still dragging through the mud of days gone by and convince each other who is more and who is less responsible. That is why it is good to hold conferences like this one.

On the other hand, I wish to recall that all conditions have now been ripe for a speedier involvement of Serbia in negotiations, opening of chapters, because the Brussels talks ended successfully”, Minister Dacic said at the press conference.