



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the 126th session of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in Sofia:

Mr. Chairman,

Fellow Ministers, Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to attend the Ministerial-Level Meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and to use the opportunity to exchange views with my fellow Ministers and other Heads of Delegation on the current open issues facing Europe.

First of all, I would like to thank Bulgaria for the excellent organization of the Meeting, and to extend my congratulations for its commitment and the way in which it chaired the Committee of Ministers in the previous period.

At the same time, I would like to congratulate Estonia and wish it success in chairing the Committee in the coming period, along with offering our assurances that it may count on Serbia's support in the discharge of these responsible duties.

We have very carefully analyzed the Third Report by the Council of Europe Secretary General on the state of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the challenges facing Europe today. We share the common concern about the problems highlighted in the Report. Terrorism, the migration crisis, instability and conflicts in some parts of our continent, including the economic crisis, all pose a kind of a threat to the core values that the Council of Europe is supposed to safeguard. We strongly believe that the only effective answer lies in joint action by all members.

We believe that Council of Europe activities aimed at combating terrorism could be successful in the long run, as they focus on the root causes and generators of this global scourge. Legal frameworks, education, Internet and other important areas are spheres where Member States should be determined to incorporate and intensify Council of Europe standards, and implement them with even greater resolve.

The current migrant crisis constitutes an unprecedented challenge for Europe and a sort of test of political solidarity and preservation of stability. Serbia is one of the countries that has been and continues to be under the attack of the huge wave of migration. This is a great burden for my country which has already had the vast and painful experience with refugees and internally displaced persons. We believe that the migrant crisis requires a resolved and, above all, unified and coordinated response of all European countries.

Concurrently, Serbia has been investing significant efforts to address the problem in the most humane manner, by providing adequate care, temporary shelter and access to information on asylum procedures. Particular attention has been devoted to vulnerable population groups, especially children, to the effect of protecting them from abuse and the potential threat of organized crime, including psycho-social support in cooperation with UNICEF and the Danish Refugee Council.

We believe that the Organisation has both the instruments and capacities to contribute, in line with its mandate, to the resolution of problems in crisis areas, through engagement in the preservation of democracy, protection of human and minority rights and the rule of law, as well as in the areas of constitutional, legislative and judicial reforms, including the fight against corruption. We further believe that any Council of Europe involvement in politically unstable or crisis situations should be based on the consensus of all Member States.

In this context, it is important to note the continued enhancement of the effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights, as one of the main pillars the entire system of European conventions and Council of Europe principles and goals rests upon.

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no doubt that tolerance and solidarity in Europe have been put to a major test in many respects, and that they are both essential in overcoming the difficulties facing Europe. Our experiences on the national as well as regional levels prompt us to refer to the principles of constructive cooperation and tolerance, with the aim of reaching higher goals on which we will all agree.

In this spirit, I would like to recall the constructiveness demonstrated by Serbia in accepting the interaction between the Council of Europe and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo and Metohija, in their functional capacity. The higher goal in this particular case is our conviction that Council of Europe activities in Kosovo should be continued in order to ensure effective implementation of the principles and standards in the fields of democracy, protection of human and minority rights, the rule of law as well as cultural heritage. At the same time, status neutral Council of Europe engagement in Kosovo while respecting UNSC Resolution 1244 is the only acceptable engagement to us, and we expect the Organisation to continue to consistently honour this principled position.

Thank you for your attention.