



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, H. E. Mr. Ivica Dacic In an Informal Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs(Gymnich) in Bratislava:

Mr. Chairman,

Dear fellow Ministers,

I am greatly pleased for this opportunity to speak to you today about the security challenges that might determine the future of the European Union – about terrorism, extremism and radicalism, the phenomena we are increasingly faced with, and that we must tackle together.

As Al-Qaeda, Daesh and their globally spreading branches came into existence, terrorism transformed itself into a new phenomenon of universal character, thus posing an even more dangerous threat. The phenomenon of "foreign terrorist fighters" (FTFs), primarily coming from the youth population and growing more radicalized in foreign battlefields, has spawned new transnational risks.

Over the years preceding the appearance of Daesh, Serbia has been warning, often to no avail, of the rise of Islamic extremism and radicalism in the Western Balkans, which also manifested itself in terrorist attacks on the police station in Bugojno, the US Embassy in Sarajevo, the police station in Zvornik. Many extremists, who are even today fighting in the Middle East battlefields, used to join the so-called "Kosovo Liberation Army" during the Kosovo conflict, and had previously been involved in conflicts in the area of the former Yugoslavia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The total number of the recruited FTFs in the WB region is not negligible- according to the estimates, around 900 individuals from the Western Balkans are currently engaged in the area of Syria and Iraq; out of the said number, around 400 are coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, while around 300 are coming from Kosovo and Metohija, many of whom are notorious for their extreme brutality or participation in suicide attacks. Forty-one individuals from the area of Raska have also taken part in conflicts in Syria and Iraq so far, which means that Serbia has the least foreign fighters in the region, in comparison to its total population. FTFs coming from the Western Balkans are heading for the battlefields directly from the European countries, as well.

The funds are raised both in the Western Balkans and in the countries of the EU. We should keep it in mind that the majority of FTFs are aged between 15 and 35, and that entire families, who have embraced the Daesh ideology, are heading for the battlefields.

These additionally radicalized fighters are returning and staying in touch with terrorist cells, engaging in propaganda activities with the aim of mobilizing new FTFs and having them transported to the battlefields, thus posing a constant danger, due to the risk of direct terrorist actions being carried out, not only in the WB region territory, but also Europe-wide. Besides, we are witnessing the enormous migrant wave, threatening to flood the European Union, bringing a certain number of terrorists, extremists and foreign fighters, in addition to millions of tormented individuals. Self-radicalized persons, inclined towards terrorist organizations and their ideologies, who have not been identified as members of either terrorist or extremist groups, pose an additional challenge.

Esteemed colleagues, Europe is faced with the increasing threat of terrorist attacks, similar to those in Belgium, France, Germany and Turkey, and with the imperative need to forestall and timely reveal intentions of either individuals or organizations, as well as to cut off terrorism-related financial flows and the recruitment flows of foreign terrorist fighters, and to find the best methods to suppress extremism and radicalization, of youth in particular, in its own society. Countering terrorism and extremism through repressive measures only is not enough, it is also necessary to address the crucial issue of integration of people of all religious and political backgrounds into the modern society, based on shared values, in parallel with fostering inter-faith dialogue.

Emerging threats and challenges require an innovative approach, at both national and international levels. We should all contribute to these efforts by working together and through mutual understanding, information sharing, and coordination of measures undertaken and a high level of trust.

From the very beginning, Serbia has joined the Global Coalition against Daesh/ISIL and has made its contribution to the extent of its abilities. As the last year's OSCE Chair, in the first, politico-military dimension, we focused our attention on terrorism as a priority. We have been cooperating in the assessments of the state of play with regard to terrorism in the region and in sharing operational information. Major breakthroughs have been made at the national level as well: the Criminal Code has provided for the criminalization of activities related to the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and their involvement in foreign conflicts, several national strategies have been adopted, while the adoption of counter-terrorism strategy is currently in its final stages.

Serbia has worked devotedly to achieve its goal of full membership of the European Union. We believe and hope that this year would bring about opening of other negotiating chapters and that we are going to make further progress in the negotiations on already opened chapters, by embracing European norms and standards. The Western Balkans region is an initial ante-room leading to the EU, and therefore Serbia, as a credible and responsible country, has been working wholeheartedly and devotedly on maintaining regional stability. The progress made by each of us individually means progress for the region as a whole, whereas regional cooperation

is our common requirement and a precondition for accession to EU membership. Serbia's orientation is to conduct an open dialogue on all outstanding issues, to overcome the bad legacy of the past, and to encourage the process of reconciliation in the region.

However, Serbia's concern is that the old forms of extremism have been revived in our neighbourhood, through direct and indirect attempts at promoting and rehabilitating Nazi and Fascist ideologies from the past, that were defeated in the Second World War. This has been done in various ways through the affirmation of these ideologies' symbols and iconography, which the official authorities have failed to condemn. The strength of European democracies, economic development and ethical values of the present-day Europe and the European Union rest upon the freedom-loving traditions and the age-long aspirations of European nations for peace and cooperation, that were definitively achieved by a magnificent victory won and by heavy losses paid in defeating Nazi-Fascism.

Drawing on its past experiences, the Republic of Serbia firmly believes that pre-emptive action and stemming the root causes of the emergence of extreme and radicalized political and religious movements and ideologies are the essence of the efforts aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the future. For my part, I believe that all of us have enough strength, good will, determination and courage not to allow the restoration of the ideas proven wrong in the past and nip in the bud the incoming and ever-growing deformed politico-religious ideologies. Any form of radicalism and extremism is unacceptable to us and Serbia will, as in the past, remain a committed and reliable partner to the European Union, in the struggle against these threats to the existing European order.