



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Western Balkans Fund held today in Sarajevo:

"Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at the second meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Western Balkans Fund.

The Fund today represents the most active element of regional cooperation, which will, I am confident, resolutely pave the way for cooperation in the fields of culture, science and research, youth exchanges and strengthening of sustainable development in a way that other regions of Europe used to come together and enhance their cooperation in the past. Let us not forget that the WBF is a unique cooperation mechanism in the Western Balkan region which falls entirely in the competence of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. It is therefore a unique tool available to us, wielding influence which can help bring about tangible positive changes.

Following our first and founding meeting in September last year in Bled, a new EC strategy for the Western Balkans has been announced, which additionally reassured us that this project, albeit not explicitly mentioned, the same as Regional Youth Cooperation Office, represents a pioneering effort bringing the region closer to Europe and, maybe even more importantly, promoting understanding and ties in the Western Balkans. I believe that our Fund will soon, through its support to concrete projects, contribute to improving the image of our region in European institutions and EU Member States. Serbia is ready to increase its annual contribution to the Fund in order to make it even more operational and relevant.

I am very proud, dear colleagues, that civil society organizations in Serbia fully recognized the

opportunities offered by the WBF and responded to the first public call for project financing by submitting more than 80 projects. The fact that they are at the top of the list demonstrates not only their huge interest in such opportunities but also the Secretariat's outstanding expertise and capabilities. I would like to express my appreciation of the work they did so far. Let me make a little bit personal note here – I hope that the next public call will be responded by some less known non-governmental organizations from my country and the entire region, less likely to attract financial resources but whose projects are of equal value with those of their older sister organizations with more sound names.

I would like to thank the countries of the Visegrad Group, believing that all of us here share this view, for their unwavering efforts and financial support, and to the International Visegrad Fund for their invaluable and vast experience without which our Fund would not be what it is now.

I expect that we shall reach consensus today also on the important issue of doubling our contributions so that the Fund could further develop in 2018 and beyond. Let us not forget that such joint decision may prove to be important in terms of encouraging third party contributions in advance of the upcoming Western Balkans Summit in London.

Thank you."