



Statement by FDPM/MFA I. Dacic at the International Conference "New Perspectives for the Western Balkans" organized by the International Security Affairs Centre (ISAC):

"Mr. Pajevic,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

May I, first of all, thank the Fund of the International Security Affairs Centre (ISAC) for inviting me to take part in this Conference, this time again, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the Conference, for the fourth consecutive year. I am confident that every exchange of views on this theme can contribute to a clearer perception of Serbia's positions and its incontestable contribution to the EU's foreign, security and defence policies.

In the context of EU integration, the previous year was a year of expectations, aspirations and hard work on Serbia's accession to the European Union and its membership in this Organization. Although I believe that the dynamic of the accession process does not match our reform efforts and achievements, I am pleased to note that fresh steps have been made, some negotiation chapters opened, thus returning the Western Balkans to the focus of the European Union. It is unfortunate that no progress has been made in respect of procedure under Chapter 31. The screening report continues to figure on the agenda of the EU Council and the EU Member States, notwithstanding the fact that four years have elapsed since the screening meeting for this chapter took place. Regardless of that, we are strongly committed to be prepared for the activities that will follow the adoption of the report and our familiarization with its contents. For this reason we have undertaken necessary preparations and training to ensure that we have, when the time comes, a quality negotiating position, with respect of the set standards, and adequate preparation for the opening of Chapter 31.

I wish to underline that Serbia supports all changes launched in the EU with the aim of strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy, initiated by the adoption of the EU Global Strategy and the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence, European Defence Action Plan, European Defence Fund, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, and particularly the Permanent Structured Cooperation, i.e. PESCO – projects and initiatives that Serbia

actively keeps abreast with and supports, ready to actively join them, as soon as the conditions have been met. Particular attention is undoubtedly focused on the creation of PESCO, and we are highly interested in possible participation of candidate countries in this initiative. It is on the European Union to identify the possibilities and potential modalities, while we remain open to talks and possible engagement in this field of European policies.

Serbia also followed the activities on the elaboration of the EU Global Strategy, and proceeded to its analysis as soon as it was publicized. As you know, we were particularly encouraged by the fact that the EU Global Strategy clearly highlighted that the European stability and security are contingent on the stability in the Balkans, and that a credible enlargement policy is investment in European security and prosperity.

The changes in the strategic environment have imposed the need for modifying national documents in the security and defence field. Serbia has drawn up its new draft National Security Strategy and Defence Strategy, which have been submitted for public debate. The essential commitments that have guided us in this process include an integrated approach to security, military neutrality and commitment to join the European Union.

I believe that you will agree with me when I say that Chapter 31 is all too often perceived solely through the perspective of our alignment with EU decisions and declarations. Countless efforts, activities and accomplishments of the Republic of Serbia in other areas within the same chapter are being unjustifiably and unfairly overlooked, those proving that Serbia is a reliable partner, ready to share responsibility in facing security challenges and in promoting European security. I would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to some of these.

In October last year, a round of bilateral political consultations was held with the European External Action Service, in which I participated personally, while early this year a second round of consultations between the EEAS and the Western Balkans Six followed. These meetings presented us with an excellent opportunity to discuss not only the relations between Serbia or the Western Balkans and the EU, but also numerous other topics of international relevance. It is my belief that open and sincere communication is key to clearing up any misunderstandings, and as I said earlier, the right way to promote cooperation and build mutual trust.

I would like to note that the Republic of Serbia, by participating in multinational operations shares responsibility as a credible partner, while contributing to the maintenance of peace and security. Namely, Serbia is currently participating in four EU-mandated operations: one in Mali and the Central African Republic each, and two more in Somalia. In addition to EU peace missions, Serbia has also taken part in UN-mandated missions, as ninth European country according to the size of personnel, and third largest contributor in Europe in relation to its population. We are firmly committed to improving our contribution through secondment of civilian personnel to multinational peace support operations. To this end, Serbia has taken steps towards establishing a required legislative and institutional framework, including through amendments to the Law on Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, it is our expectation that an Action Plan to build capacity for the secondment of civilians to multinational operations would be adopted shortly.

Allow me to recall that the Republic of Serbia is one of only four non-EU Member States which signed an Administrative Arrangement with the European Defence Agency. Also, following the decision to join the EU Battlegroup concept, Serbia joined the HELBROC battlegroup as well. I am confident that this will contribute to the promotion of cooperation, not only with the EU, but also with the member countries of this initiative.

In November 2017 we seconded our national liaison officer to the European Union Military Staff

(EUMS). Even though Serbia has yet to join the EU, such an opportunity was made possible to us as an expression of gratitude and appreciation for the Republic of Serbia's participation in the EU-mandated operations and missions so far, but also as a result of our mutual assessment that this would contribute to strengthening our cooperation further and increasing the efficiency of communication.

Serbia's participation in new projects and initiatives is in the interest of all, it being beneficial to the development of operational capacities of the Republic of Serbia, to the strengthening of interoperability and cooperation with EU Member States, but is also of importance to the EU as a whole and its Member States. We are all the more aware that current security threats and challenges go beyond state boundaries and exceed abilities and capacities of a single country or region. To be able to provide an adequate response, it is incumbent upon us to cooperate closely, coordinate our actions and produce our best efforts. The migration crisis has shown in particular the extent to which the mutual cooperation and solidarity-based approach is needed. For its part, Serbia has proven by its own example that it is ready to take its share of responsibility and make a significant contribution to the settlement of the crisis and reaching a common solution. The focal points of crisis in our immediate neighbourhood, terrorism, radicalization and many other challenges at the global, European and regional level clearly indicate that we need to remain committed to mutual cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All the inputs and activities undertaken by Serbia under Chapter 31 are not possible to enumerate in a single statement, but I believe that this is enough to point out that Chapter 31 is much more than a mere percentage of alignment. It is clear to us that this matter attracts a great deal of attention and we are willing to openly discuss this and other topics at all times. Serbia aims unequivocally to become a full-fledged member of the European Union and we are aware of all the requirements that we need to meet before we join the EU. However, I must draw attention to the importance of preserving territorial integrity, I believe not only in the case of our country but also that of any other country in the world. Serbia has adopted a consistent approach to decisions on alignment, and it is always guided by the same principle. We cannot reciprocate by aligning with the decisions against those who support and assist our diplomatic efforts.

I would like to use this opportunity as well to reiterate that we remain committed to regional stability and dialogue on the normalization of relations with Pristina, but the cooperation and collaboration of the other party to the dialogue is also required, primarily in the sense that it implements the commitments stemming from the agreements already reached. I call once again on representatives of the European Union to fully support our request for complete implementation of all EU-facilitated agreements. It is inadmissible that Pristina unilaterally amends the provisions of the Brussels Agreement and constantly throws spanner in the works of the establishment of the Community of majority Serb Municipalities. Honouring agreements, which have been very difficult for our side too, and refraining from provocations and maintaining stability are in the interest of us all.

Developments in Kosovo and Metohija over the past years have clearly shown that an international presence in Kosovo and Metohija is a must, primarily for the purpose of securing a life together free from hindrance for all inhabitants living there. The situation on the ground is still fragile, while the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina are incapable of guaranteeing safety and security of all citizens. Like in the past period we cannot rely on Pristina to provide guarantees of the rule of law and equality before the law. Therefore, we urge

the EU to retain the mandate of EULEX in its present capacity, without reducing the scope of its powers.

In conclusion, I would like to re-emphasize the readiness of Serbia to talk on all issues, to continually deepen the cooperation and take part in EU initiatives. I hope that it is more than clear that Serbia is a credible and responsible partner which does not only wait to assume its obligations once it becomes a full-fledged EU member but which is proactive, willing to shoulder both the burden and responsibilities, as a friend and partner of all EU Member States.

Thank you for your attention and I hope that we shall see each other next year too."