

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Snezana Jankovic assessed that the bilateral cooperation with Austria had been better than ever, following the visit made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria, Sebastian Kurz. The interview was published in the "Danas" special supplement.

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COMMON HISTORY, cultural similarities, and geographic proximity enable Serbia and Austria to foster excellent bilateral relations. According to Serbian MFA State Secretary Snezana Jankovic, bilateral relations between Serbia and Austria have been maintained at the highest level, perhaps better than ever when considering the overall history of relations between our two countries. "They have been characterized by regular contacts among top officials, developed economic cooperation, cooperation in Serbia's process of European integration, and a large Serbian community in Austria constitutes one of its most important factors. I would particularly like to single out developmental potentials of regional cooperation, excellent police cooperation, very intensive military cooperation, as well as cultural cooperation", Snezana Jankovic said.

□ The recent visit that the Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz made to Serbia demonstrated Austria's high degree of readiness to support Serbia in its European integration process. In what areas is Austria expected to assist Serbia throughout this process?

- The visit made by Minister Sebastian Kurz was a good opportunity for the continuation of the high-level dialogue on the most important issues of bilateral cooperation, EU accession negotiating process, and for the exchange of views on the situation in the region. The visit undoubtedly reaffirmed the importance that Austria attaches to the strengthening of bilateral relations with Serbia, and cooperation in the area of development and stabilization of the region. Minister Sebastian Kurz highlighted that Austria would continue to lend support and assistance to Serbia, with the aim of Serbia completing the negotiating process successfully. By that we primarily mean Austria's political support within the EU, but also concrete assistance through implementation of numerous "twinning" projects, representing an instrument for support that the institutions of the Member States provide for candidate countries' institutions, the field in which Austria possesses both experience and capacities.

□ In your opinion, what are the most important bilateral agreements entered into between the two countries? Which one of them should produce concrete results in the foreseeable future?

- I would like to single out agreements in the area of economic cooperation - on mutual incentives and investment protection, and economic, agricultural, industrial, technical and technological cooperation. The Agreement on developmental cooperation is another important

treaty. Agreements on readmission and cooperation in fight against international illicit drug trafficking and international terrorism are also very significant.

What role does the Danube region play in Serbian and Austrian cooperation, when it comes to both economy and historical heritage?

- I have already touched on the potential for development of regional cooperation, where the Danube and the Danube region have proven to offer best prospects, with around one hundred and ten million residents. Along with Austria and twelve other countries, Serbia has participated in the drafting process of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, encompassing cooperation in the strengthening of communication and building of infrastructure, environmental protection, tapping of resources and promotion of tourism and cultural heritage. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) is one of the partners in the implementation of the "Socio-economic development of the Danube Region" project, constituting a part of the Financing Agreement between Serbia and the EU. Budget for the upcoming revitalization works on the Golubac Fortress will also be allocated from the ADA funds, within the framework of this project.

□ Does the MFA maintain contacts with the citizens of Serbian origin living in Austria and in what way?

- In the recent talks in Belgrade, Ministers Ivan Mrkic and Sebastian Kurz stressed the role the Serbian Diaspora has when it comes to the enhancement of bilateral relations. Minister Kurz assessed that a large number of Serbs and Austrian citizens of Serbian origin constitute a well-integrated group in Austria, and a bridge between our two countries. Incidentally, there are over two hundred thousand Serbs and citizens of Serbian origin in Austria. Association of Serbs in Austria acts as an umbrella organization, and there are 13 communities and over 70 clubs and associations of Serbian citizens. MFA's contacts with the Serbian community in Austria are maintained through the Vienna Embassy and the Consulate-General in Salzburg, concerning all issues of importance for both their everyday life and the ties with their country of origin.