



Address delivered by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic at the Opening of the Conference “WW II: Remembrance and Public Policies” in Belgrade, on 8 September 2015:

“Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be able to address this Conference by which our OSCE Chairmanship wishes to make its contribution to the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII. This year we mark several important anniversaries. Thus, we commemorated the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, a document our Organization was built upon, in July in Helsinki. However, I believe that the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, in the circumstances that seem in many ways reminiscent of the world “disjointed”, deserves particular attention. Can we imagine what the world would be like today had the anti-Hitler coalition not been victorious? Would we be able to speak of equality, diversity, human and minority rights, gender equality, briefly, about everything making the very basis of our contemporary society and constituting the foundations of our Organization? That is why it is important to recall that it was owing precisely to the outcome of the anti- fascism struggle that Europe and the world regained their dignity, liberty and the right of diversity.

Reflecting upon the ways of marking this important anniversary, ways worthy of the letter and spirit of our Organization, we had in mind that this anniversary has already been commemorated in a dignified manner by military parades, numerous scientific meetings and in many other ways. For this reason, we have decided to focus on how WWII influenced the development of international cooperation in the post-war period. On the other hand, we wanted to look at the present and the future, believing that it is important to pay attention both to current public policies and to remembrance culture. In fact, we wanted to pave a way for the debate on whether it is necessary to give special attention to these issues in the OSCE context, as well.

There is a thesis about the connection between war and the evolution of the civilization, saying that the driving force behind the overall past technological advance was solely the need for military domination and that all inventions primarily served military purposes and were then adjusted to peaceful purposes. I will leave it to experts to judge the veracity of this thesis which definitely raises serious doubts about the capacity of humanity to learn from its own mistakes.

It is evident that the scale of the tragedy caused by WWII, however, made the world of that time take a deep breath and try, despite the enormous ideological confrontations that arose immediately after the war, to establish mechanisms to prevent this evil from ever recurring again. The outcome of these efforts was the unparalleled enhancement of international cooperation and creation of a system of international commitments so that they could not be easily violated or disregarded. Against a backdrop of a sudden rise of multilateralism, the United Nations which will also observe its 70th anniversary, came into being. As I already mentioned, we recently marked the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the OSCE, which was also one of the products of this trend. Many other major international conventions like the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as the most important among them, were put in place. All these instruments failed to prevent the outbreak of new armed conflicts around the world, but I still believe that they significantly contributed to preventing them from becoming conflicts of a global scale.

I also believe that over the past decades states have learned that only a common outlook on the past can bring peace and prosperity in the future. Symbolically, a watershed in facing the past and reconciliation processes was Willy Brandt's falling to his knees in the Warsaw ghetto. At a practical level, a strong contribution has been made for decades already by projects such as joint commissions of historians and joint textbooks. However, although we have traversed a long road on the way to facing the burden of our historical legacy, phenomena of historical revisionism and neo-Nazism still persist. This is evidence that some societies still need to raise awareness of the real horrors of WWII. In this context, it would be interesting to have experts debate on the topic as to, in addition to legislation, mainly at the state level, it will be necessary also to develop international mechanisms to counter these phenomena.

Nevertheless, I believe that ignorance is our worst enemy when it comes to WWII remembrance culture. However, in the world of today formal education and school systems are one of the many factors having an impact on the shaping of historical consciousness and views of development. Pop culture and the internet play a much more important role. Neo-Nazi propaganda on the internet is subject to prosecution in many countries, but it is a question what we can do together to prevent it.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The history of the human kind is full of lessons of what man can do to inflict harm. Nonetheless, WWII is unique in the sense that it shows the scale of wrongdoing that a powerful and technologically superior country was capable of doing in the service of dark ideology based on annihilation of human dignity and the principle of extermination on racial grounds. Have the proportions of this evil been woven into mankind's DNA, have they affected the human being by genetically remembering the horrors, though being slightly changed for the better? Does the science have an answer to this question? I don't know. That is why we should continue to insist together on the significance of victory over fascism and make an effort so that fascism in no way and in no form become acceptable for any human being. We are going to be successful in this endeavour only if we persevere in preserving memory of this darkest period in the history of mankind and of the glorious struggle that helped overcome it.

Thank you.”