



Statement made by HE Mr Ivica Dacic, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 66th session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR held in Geneva:

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This annual session of the Executive Committee is taking place against a specific backdrop of mass mixed migration flows. Great many people from Syria, but also those from other regions in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, fleeing the brutalities of armed conflict and terrorist attacks, are seeking shelter in other countries, hoping for solidarity and protection. In addition to conflicts, terrorism and political instability, poverty and pursuit of a better life are yet another key factor in mass population movements facing us today. This problem is not of recent date, and we are all aware that it will not be solved any time soon. Therefore, it is necessary for the entire international community to act resolutely and responsibly in order to find both short-term and long-term solutions for providing immediate humanitarian assistance and for addressing the key root-causes of mass migration.

Serbia is along one of the main routes of the huge migration wave. This trend has been in evidence since 2009, and has been intensified this year, especially in the summer months. Since the beginning of this year until today, Serbia's state border has been crossed by more than 170 000 migrants, five times more compared to 2014. The fact is that a total of around 600 asylum applications have been put in, showing that the desired destination of refugees and migrants is not Serbia but the EU Member States.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia has demonstrated at all levels willingness to confront, to the extent of its capabilities, the situation of a massive influx of migrants and did its part of the job in a responsible way. We are doing our best to provide adequate reception, assistance in food and medication, temporary accommodation facilities, healthcare and information about asylum procedures for migrants while they are in Serbia, fully respecting their human rights. Recognizing the need for urgent and coordinated action, on 18 June, the

Government of the Republic of Serbia set up its Working Group on the settlement of the problem of mixed migratory flows, and in early September, it adopted a plan of activities in the event of an increased flow of migrants and the decision to open an escrow account to collect donations for migrants.

No country, Serbia included, can bear this huge burden alone. We have limited capacities for this – in terms of human and financial resources, as well as reception capacities. In cooperation with the Serbian Red Cross, our international partners, primarily UNHCR and non-governmental organizations, the Government and citizens of the Republic of Serbia are making enormous efforts aimed at providing appropriate assistance to migrants while they are in Serbia. What is equally important is that we have invested extraordinary efforts to increase management of our borders, to prevent criminal activities such of smugglers and human traffickers exploiting the misfortune of these vulnerable people. Serbia considers that in dealing with this complex challenge currently faced by us, there can be no partial or local steps, such as closure of borders, blockades for freight traffic and building of fences, but in co-operation between affected countries, common response by the European Union as a whole and the engagement of the entire international community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Guterres for recognizing and publicly welcoming the efforts Serbia is making, as well as for the ongoing planned activities of the UNHCR in my country, in the context of our joint efforts to adequately respond to the challenges posed by the current refugee crisis.

Mr. Chairman,

The fact that the Serbian people themselves were also forced in the recent past to migrate to save their own lives, fleeing the war, makes us understand the situation of the people from crisis areas in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and responsive to their problems.

I have to recall that Serbia has unfortunately had significant painful experiences with refugees and internally displaced persons. Today, Serbia is home to 44 000 persons still having the status of refugees, who have come from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and who have been in our care for two decades already, including over 200 000 internally displaced people, forced out of their homes in Kosovo and Metohija after 1999.

I firmly believe that reaching durable solutions for protracted displacement should be dealt with in parallel with the resolution of the current refugee crisis. I trust that we all share the view that people in protracted displacement must not be overlooked.

The experience teaches us that there are no simple, administrative solutions to the refugee problem. For this reason, Serbia did not accept the UNHCR recommendation of April 2014 on status cessation for refugees from Croatia who fled in 1992-1995. The fact that a year and a half after the recommendation, refugees from Croatia still face serious obstacles in the exercise of their tenancy and pension rights, reconstruction of homes, restitution of agricultural land, use of Cyrillic script, employment in public institutions, etc, speaks in favour of our position. What is of more concern are growing incidents of discrimination and hate speech against the Serbian

minority in Croatia, including returnees. The logical consequence of this is that great many refugees from Croatia have opted for local integration in Serbia, because their return as a form of a durable solution is essentially not available to them. We expect that the second six-month UNHCR's report on the implementation of recommendation, which was due last May, will portray the situation on the ground in an unbiased manner, and that it will be distributed to all Member States of the Executive Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

Serbia attaches great importance to the regional process of settlement of the refugee problem, including their needs and full respect of their rights, as well as full implementation of the Regional Housing Programme (RHP). This process is important, both from the point of view of resolution of the refugee issue and the process of regional reconciliation.

In my capacity as Chair of the National RHP Steering Committee, I would like to point out that Serbia, in cooperation with UNHCR and OSCE, has been constantly carrying out the process of selection of RHP beneficiaries. Taking into account that the number of the displaced in Serbia is much higher than the beneficiaries envisaged by the RHP, this is a sensitive process and requires careful selection. I would like to remind that the RHP funding has not been provided in full, and that the lacking funds are yet to be raised collectively. We are looking forward to cooperation with partner countries, UNHCR, EU, OSCE, Council of Europe Development Bank and donor countries to make additional efforts to fully implement this Programme without setting any deadlines that cannot be met by the partner countries. In particular, I would like to express our thanks to the partners without which the RHP would not be possible, primarily the European Union, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Turkey, Luxembourg, Slovakia and other donors.

Mr. Chairman,

I must recall that after the sixteen-years of international presence in Kosovo and Metohija, out of more than 200 000 internally displaced persons, less than 5% have returned to the Province, of which only a half are sustainable. I recall that under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), creation of the conditions for a safe and free return of displaced persons is one of the main tasks of the international presence in Kosovo and Metohija. Obstacles to sustainable return to Kosovo and Metohija, inter alia, include bad security and economic situations; lack of effective protection of rights; impossibility of restitution of property and of using destroyed and dispossessed properties; aggravated access to public services; no possibility of use of the mother tongue, etc. I expect that through our joint efforts, in cooperation with UNHCR and other relevant actors, we will do more to find just and durable solutions for this population. The current complex refugee situation calls for undiminished attention, efficiency and above all, solidarity of all relevant actors both in providing emergency humanitarian assistance for refugees and migrants in the current crisis, and in reaching durable solutions for persons in protracted displacement. UNHCR and other international partners can, as always, count on Serbia's cooperation in the achievement of this goal.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now speak in the capacity as the Chairperson in Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. First of all, I would like to announce that tomorrow there will be a joint meeting of all the three OSCE Committees - on security, economy and environmental dimension and human dimensions in Vienna, in the context of the ongoing migration crisis, taking into account the cross-dimensional nature of migration.

In the South Caucasus, the OSCE, UNHCR and EU work together in the framework of the second working group of the Geneva International Discussions on humanitarian issues, particularly matters relating to IDPs and refugees.

Our two Organizations have also shared their knowledge and expertise with a view to producing guidelines and documents supporting the work of agencies and staff involved in refugee protection. The Protection Checklist is one such example. It sets out main principles and practices underpinning a collaborative approach to addressing displacement and protection of displaced populations. We see its useful application in the Western Balkans and it has also been rolled out in Central Asia.

Our co-operation with UNHCR has been particularly significant in response to the crisis in and around Ukraine. Our Special Monitoring Mission has joined forces with UNHCR in Kyiv and in the field to share information and identify priority areas in need of attention. UNHCR has been actively involved in training our monitors, sensitizing them to protection issues and suggesting practical ways to gather relevant information for more substantive and focused reporting on internal displacement. This co-operation is proving particularly valuable and effective for our personnel on the ground and their ability to support efforts to address the needs of internally displaced persons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Forced displacement is particularly acute in parts of the Mediterranean and affecting both OSCE participating States and OSCE Partners for Co-operation. The Mediterranean is a region that the OSCE has paid attention to since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, which early on recognized that European and Mediterranean security are inextricably linked. Recent developments clearly show that we will need to increase our interaction. This year's OSCE Mediterranean Conference on 20-21 October in Jordan will offer a timely opportunity to step up our engagement and migration will be one of the main items on the agenda.

The international movement of people has been a key issue of debate for OSCE participating States since the CSCE Process. Yet, the size, composition, and direction of migration flows within, from, and into the OSCE area have been evolving considerably and in unforeseen ways since 1975. The OSCE has reacted to this change and our tools have evolved accordingly. We are now very active on key fronts such as protecting the victims of human trafficking, including along migration routes, supporting border management capacities of states, but also creating the right conditions in host societies by promoting tolerance and non-discrimination which are a key ingredient of any sustainable integration strategy.

Asylum and migration management systems in many parts of Europe are under tremendous strain. This is certainly very much the case for countries like my own that are located on the

Western Balkans route to Western Europe. As we approach winter, there is no doubt that we will be facing a regional emergency and a large-scale humanitarian crisis unless all relevant actors at the international, regional and local level manage to find a more coordinated approach and support each other in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner.

As we internally discuss ways in which the OSCE can bring added value to the international response to the ongoing refugee and migration crisis, we look to further co-operation with the UNHCR as an essential element of engagement in this area. In moving forward, we can rely on well-established and effective channels of communication and continue to build on our very positive shared operational experience.

Thank you for your attention.