



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic is on a visit to Budapest today at the invitation of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary Peter Szijjarto, to participate in a meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of Hungary, the Republic of Serbia, the Hellenic Republic, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Minister for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, devoted to issues of energy security in Central and South-East Europe.

"I would like to express my satisfaction with the representatives of five countries, starting from Turkey, through Greece and Macedonia, to Serbia and Hungary, for the first time officially expressing their readiness to participate together in infrastructure projects that are to provide our countries with a possibility to ensure energy security. All of our countries have been severely affected by the cancellation of the South Stream project, Hungary and Serbia in particular, having gone far in the preparation of that project. As a consequence of the suspension of the project, we have found ourselves in a highly unfavourable situation. Only 20% of Serbia's gas supplies come from domestic sources, and only one major gas supply route leads to the country, entering from Hungary, but originating from Russia and heading through Ukraine, the very route that was, as you are well aware of, shut down several years ago due to the gas crisis in relations between Russia and Ukraine. Such circumstances have brought Hungary and Serbia before a major issue - how to provide energy security for our countries. Not only that this issue is of vital economic and energy related importance for us, but it is also an issue of national importance", stressed the Head of Serbian diplomacy at a joint press conference.

"I would like to express my gratitude to Minister Peter Szijjarto for his suggestion that this meeting be held. Today we have all shown readiness to discuss any possible sources of gas supply for all of our countries. We would not want to select one option only, but we cannot allow our countries to be left with no gas supply, either. In this context, it is very important that all the projects are taken into consideration, and we welcome the readiness of all the countries to participate in this initiative".

Minister Dacic emphasized his expectation that a full project be defined first, and to be followed by developing a joint feasibility study. Financing of this project is a new issue for Serbia, since the country had a defined financial plan for the South Stream project with Russia. Building of the South Stream was to be financed with the participation of and loan from Gasprom, and paid off by Serbia by collecting gas transit fee revenues.

"In these new circumstances both Hungary, Serbia and all the other countries must embark on discussing a financial plan to be able to fully define it, implying talks with third countries and companies, that is, third parties. What is most important, I have been critical of representatives of the European Commission today, for I believe that a proper communication must be achieved in a timely manner so that our efforts would not be in vain", said the Minister.

"As citizens of the Western Balkans or Southern Europe via Greece and Turkey we have the same rights and we are equal to the citizens meeting their needs through the Nord Stream and other pipelines that have enjoyed the support of the European Commission and, unlike the South Stream, have been exempted from various packages of energy measures.

In addition, it is gas we are talking about and not geopolitical relations between the West and Russia. Gas has no colour. We must find a solution to that problem and the European Union is obliged to provide us with help. On the one hand, we are willing to comply with European rules, but on the other it is not acceptable that geostrategic relations affect our citizens. We are also interested in other liquefied gas projects, originating from different source countries.

All these projects need be considered and we absolutely agree that the expert level process of devising and finishing the feasibility study should continue now. But, in advance of this, we must convene with the Russian Federation and the European Commission and establish whether the prospects of the project with Turkey are to be considered serious and consistent with the legislation of the European Union, in order to prevent yet another unfavourable outcome that may follow. I am glad that our countries have for the first time shown a common interest, the essence of which is our five countries' readiness to work together on solving the issue of gas infrastructure, that is, building a gas pipeline.

They may present all the possible options to us, and we will certainly choose the best one. So far, the only tangible option in our area has been this one, now emerging as a substitute for the former South Stream.

I am hopeful that we will, guided by common interests, successfully bring this project to a conclusion, with no adverse effects on our citizens", said the Head of Serbian diplomacy at the press conference.

On the fringes of the Ministerial Meeting in Budapest, Minister Dacic had bilateral meetings with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic Nikolaos Kotzias and Minister of EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey Volkan Bozkir.