



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic held today a regular monthly press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he summarized the activities for the month of March and announced the forthcoming activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the month of April.

Minister Dacic underlined at the very beginning that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was committed, in March, to Serbia's European integration process and strengthening of bilateral and regional cooperation. Speaking about the EU integration process, the Minister referred to the visit to Belgrade by EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, on 27 March. On that occasion, High Representative Mogherini noted the progress Serbia had made on its EU integration path and expressed expectation that the first negotiation chapters would be opened shortly.

HR Mogherini further positively assessed the role played by Serbia in the region, particularly on the bilateral level.

The Serbian Foreign Minister participated, in March, at the informal Meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the EU and candidate countries held in Riga, whose participants also included EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn.

As regards conferences of regional importance, Dacic singled out the visit to Croatia where he had talks with the highest-ranking officials of that country, President Kolinda Grabar Kitarivic, Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Vesna Pusic, President of the Sabor Josip Leka, representatives of Serbs in Croatia, President of the Serbian National Council Milorad Pupovac and the Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana, Mr. Porfijije. All the talks with the Croatian officials confirmed the readiness of both sides and their good will to address outstanding bilateral issues, and the interlocutors also discussed the possibility of joint ventures in projects of shared interest in the region, including the project on the prevention of flooding. The position of Serbia clearly emphasized during the visit was that promotion of relations and cooperation with Croatia, along with addressing all outstanding issues, is of paramount importance to Serbia and the stability of the entire region. Minister Dacic pointed out:

“We have divided our issues into three groups: one group includes issues from the past, open issues which, we are aware, should not burden our present and future cooperation. The other two groups of issues are related to bilateral relations and economic cooperation, as well as those in the European integration area, i.e. issues related to our possible joint venture projects, mutual cooperation in infrastructure and energy sectors and a range of other issues that are very important when it comes to our mutual relations.”

The Serbian Foreign Minister met the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Portugal and Italy, who visited Belgrade in March.

Particularly important was the visit of Foreign Minister Dacic and Defence Minister Bratislav Gasic to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, where bilateral meetings were held with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, and their attendance of the North Atlantic Council meeting. “The recently adopted Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) between the Republic of Serbia and NATO will constitute a framework for the further strengthening of cooperation, and a means of engagement in comprehensive reform processes, without having a bearing on Serbia’s military neutrality. Serbia particularly indicated the importance of the undiminished KFOR presence in Kosovo and Metohija. The visit left a clear political message that Serbia wished to deepen its cooperation with NATO in the mutual interest, that it maintained its status of military neutrality and that it did not intend to be admitted to NATO membership. This position of Serbia is well understood and respected by NATO and its Member States. I will underline, like Secretary General Stoltenberg did in his recent statement, that NATO respects the specificities of Serbia as a partner and wishes to enhance cooperation with it”, said the Serbian Foreign Minister.

In the context of strengthening regional cooperation, Minister Dacic participated, together with Minister Zorana Mihajlovic, in the Ministerial Meeting of the “Balkan Six” – WB6 entitled “Improving Connectivity and a Strong Core Network”, held in Pristina, with the participation of EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn.

At the invitation of Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurtz and Austrian Interior Minister Jochanna Mikl-Leitner, Minister Dacic and Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic participated together in the Conference of Ministers of Foreign and Internal Affairs of the European Union and the Western Balkans entitled “Tackling Jihadism Together”, held in Vienna. The theme of the conference was the current situation in countering terrorism, the potential threat posed by foreign fighters, as well as the range of measures applicable by the EU and the Western Balkans.

As regards the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship, the Minister drew particular attention to the decision adopted by the OSCE Permanent Council on 12 March concerning the extension of the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine to 12 months, and the potential increase in the number of observers to 1,000. Serbia was commended for successfully conducting negotiations, as was the case with the previous negotiations held in the OSCE framework on the adoption of the Organization’s budget.

Also in the capacity as OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dacic opened on 26 March, in Belgrade, the

first meeting organized by Serbia's Chairmanship – the Conference on the Protection of the Security and the Integrity of Journalists in the OSCE Region.

As the current OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Dacic participated in the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Dushanbe. All the Member States of the Collective Security Treaty Organization are also OSCE Participating States. During his visit to Tajikistan, the Head of Serbian diplomacy had meetings with the President and the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan, as well as the Foreign Ministers of Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

As regards multilateral activities of the Ministry, Dacic met with the Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Grete Faremo and thanked her for the assistance and commitment in overcoming the consequences of last year's floods. The total value of UNOPS developed projects in Serbia since 2010 amounts to approximately EUR 65 million. The UNOPS is assisting with floods rehabilitation projects worth EUR 25 million and the largest donors are EU's IPA funds, Norway, Canada, Great Britain, Switzerland and France. This was the first official visit of the UNOPS Executive Director to a European country since she took up her new appointment.

In relation to regular activities of the Ministry, it was emphasized at the news conference that the Serbian Government's Decision on visa-free entry for holders of foreign passports having a valid Schengen, UK and other Member States' visa, or visa of the United States of America, and for holders of foreign passports having residence permit in the countries of the Schengen Area, EU or the United States of America has resulted in around 800 foreign citizens entering the country each month on these grounds (a total of around 4,000 persons in the past five months), which largely included business people and tourists from China, India, Azerbaijan and Middle East countries (the Decision became effective on 8 November 2014).

On the basis of the Agreement between the European Communities and the Republic of Serbia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation in the EU Member States' territories, signed on 18 September 2007 in Brussels, Serbia has signed 18 protocols on its implementation with the EU and showed full readiness for cooperation in combating irregular migration. In the period from January to March 2015, diplomatic and consular missions of the Republic of Serbia issued more than 1,200 travel documents for our citizens' return to the Republic of Serbia. According to the reports of Serbian diplomatic and consular missions, the agreements on readmission are being implemented smoothly and according to the dynamics of EU Members.

The Head of Serbian diplomacy underlined the issue of the current political situation in Libya, warned about its deterioration and used this occasion to appeal on the citizens of the Republic of Serbia to avoid travelling to Libya, and also recommended that persons currently staying there leave the country.

With regard to his numerous visits to be made in April, Dacic stressed that he would be participating in the meeting of Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece and Turkey, scheduled for 7 April in Budapest. Energy supply

and security is the topic of this event that will serve as a forum for exchange of opinions on this important issue which has been increasingly gaining in importance.

On April 8, in Belgrade, the Minister will have consultations with OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, Head of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Apakan, and his Personal Representative in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Tagliavini.

The Head of Serbian diplomacy will participate in the 13th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to be held in Doha on 12-13 April.

This month, the Serbian Foreign Minister will also meet with his counterpart from Zambia, who will be visiting the Republic of Serbia, from 14 to 16 April. The visit of the Zambian Minister is of special significance being the first bilateral visit at Ministerial level after 25 years.

The Minister underlined the visit of German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier as a bilateral visit of great importance.

Minister Dacic also announced Latvian Foreign Minister's visit to Belgrade in April, as well as his participation in the Brdo Process Ministerial Meeting at Brdo near Kranj, on 23 April. In addition to the Foreign Ministers of the Brdo Process Participants (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*), it is planned that the Meeting also be attended by French Foreign Minister Fabius, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and German Minister of Foreign Affairs Steinmeier.