



The following is the statement of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic, delivered in the Regional Cooperation Council Annual Meeting, held today in Tirana:

“Ladies and gentlemen,
Excellencies,

Please allow me to begin by expressing gratitude to our hosts for organizing the event and for their hospitality.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the exchange of views on the current political situation and prospects of the region in the context of European integration.

I believe that you will agree with me in saying that tangible results have been achieved in this respect but that many challenges still lie ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Serbia has also invested continuous efforts towards intensifying all forms of regional cooperation contributing to the stability of the region and its European integration and international affirmation.

Serbia's proactive approach to the development of good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, as well as its results in the dialogue with the representatives of Pristina and important political decisions taken by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, have also been recognized by the European Union, as reflected, in particular, in the European Council decision to open EU accession negotiations with the Republic of Serbia.

Citizens of Serbia are aware of the ongoing complex and difficult period of the implementation of necessary reforms, but I can also note with satisfaction that Serbia has made major progress in many, very important areas such as combating corruption and organized crime, as well as in promoting human and minority rights. Thanks to the implemented reforms we can note today that Serbia succeeded in attracting EUR 1.3 billion in new investments in the last year. Also,

with a view to recovering our economy and ultimately completing the restructuring and privatization processes, a set of reform laws has been adopted and we intend to further promote business environment through improving tax laws, strengthening the innovation capacities, advancing financial discipline, further refining of labour legislation, continuing the pension and social security system reform. One of the Government's priorities is also the all-embracing reform of the state administration aimed at raising the public service quality level and increasing the accountability of public officers in the performance of their administration work.

Meetings previously held in Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels, respectively, in the "Western Balkan Six" format, contributed to the further strengthening of stability in the region and reaffirmed that regional cooperation and economic stability are the common "vehicles" for achieving European standards and meeting EU membership criteria.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to emphasize, in particular, the importance of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and its contribution to the promotion and advancement of mutual dialogue at all levels and in all areas of mutual interest for the region. Also, may I point to the results achieved by RCC in the past period and significant efforts invested by its Secretary General Goran Svilanovic.

As you know, the RCC Statute envisages the possibility of re-election of the RCC Secretary General for an additional three-year period. I take this opportunity to underline that much of the credit goes to Mr. Goran Svilanovic for the results achieved by the RCC in the past period, primarily with regard to the promotion and implementation of the project-oriented cooperation in the areas of common regional interest. When making a decision on the candidature of Mr. Goran Svilanovic for the post of RCC Secretary General, we had in mind that the pace of regional economic cooperation, which is of critical importance for the stability and prosperity of the Western Balkans, gained momentum following the adoption and commencement of the implementation of the Strategy, the RCC work program 2014-2016 and the RCC 2020 Strategy for SEE. During his term of office, the RCC gained further in importance both in the region and in Brussels, primarily owing to Mr. Svilanovic's continued efforts aimed at further European integration of the Western Balkans. In the mentioned period the RCC budget increased and thanks to his endeavours and constructive approach of the Republic of Serbia, amendments to the RCC Statute were adopted, leading to the comprehensive inclusion of all stakeholders in the Western Balkan region into the RCC work. In view of the achieved results and the need for continuation of the implementation of the initiated programs, the re-election of Mr. Goran Svilanovic would be a logical next step as it would be the policy of continuity and contribution to further RCC progress and development.

Serbia supports all efforts towards achieving integrated, comprehensive and sustainable economic growth in the region till 2020 and voices hope that the

implementation of the RCC 2020 Strategy for SEE will create new opportunities for interlinking of regional initiatives and EU activities and, among other, for a facilitated access to multi-beneficiary Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) as well as to other interested donors.

I am confident that regional cooperation, specific project-oriented one, constitutes the basis for fulfilling economic and political priorities in the region. The RCC 2020 Strategy for SEE itself indicates that the entire region must face together the crucial issues for all of us like economic growth and job creation. Completion of such important tasks is certainly not possible without joint cooperation at the regional level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The future of regional cooperation depends exclusively on ourselves, i.e. on the involvement of all relevant actors in the region in deepening our mutual relations at all levels as the only way to make tangible progress.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that in the past period the RCC was an active stakeholder in positive developments in the region and to reiterate that Serbia, as it has done so far, will continue to offer its strong support to the RCC work.

Thank you."