



“Dear Honorary Consuls of the Republic of Serbia,
Distinguished guests,

Let me first wish you all welcome and thank you for accepting my invitation to come to Belgrade to attend this First Conference of Honorary Consuls of the Republic of Serbia. We highly appreciate your readiness to carry out your responsible duties of Honorary Consul on a continuous basis and to protect the interests of Serbia, offering assistance and your services to Serbian citizens.

We would like to use this occasion to inform you about Serbia’s main foreign policy directions, its economic potentials as well as about the major investment projects and plans to rehabilitate and revitalize the Serbian economy. Furthermore, we would like to hear your observations and suggestions to promote our relations and cooperation with the countries where you exercise your functions as honorary consuls. There is scope for improvement of cooperation, both at the political and economic levels as well in the scientific, cultural and other fields.

Your activities and proposals can further improve and promote Serbian policies and its political, economic and cultural interests at the level of the international community, increasing its visibility, if necessary, in those countries where there are no Serbian diplomatic and consular missions.

The institution of honorary consuls has a rich tradition in the Republic of Serbia and is important in its diplomatic and consular dealings. The Kingdom of Serbia appointed its first honorary consuls as far back as the pre-WWI period in European cities such as Brussels, Liege and Geneva. Following the creation of the first Yugoslavia, the institution of honorary consuls and their network began to expand swiftly. Hence, in 1931 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had a total of 91 honorary consuls, including 62 in Europe.

Today, the Republic of Serbia has 72 Honorary Consuls, namely 19 in Europe; 25 in North and South America; and 13 each in Asia and Africa. They are predominantly business people, but there are also prominent lawyers, representatives of the academic community, cultural representatives and people having other professional backgrounds. As a rule, they are

all highly educated persons respected by their own communities, who have of their own free will and with good intentions undertaken to perform the functions of honorary consul and to represent the interests of the Republic of Serbia.

In line with our foreign policy priorities, Serbian diplomacy together with the other governmental authorities is actively involved in the protection of state's and national interests, resumption of the membership talks with the European Union, implementation of good cooperation with the key international partners and with our traditional friends throughout the world, development of good-neighbourly relations, shaping of a modern and stable Serbia, maintenance of international peace, and in upholding international law.

European Union membership is its strategic priority goal because these countries are our major trading and investment partners and this is a historic opportunity for us to carry out reforms in the country. We expect that the EU will open first chapters in the negotiations with Serbia in the course of this year, as we have well advanced in the reform process.

Also, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue will resume under the Brussels Agreement, including the implementation of the arrangements already made. Serbia's current OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office has been positively assessed by the participating States because of its principled and unbiased nature and contribution to addressing all issues of importance for the stability and security of the OSCE region.

Serbia wishes to develop good relations with all neighbouring countries and to promote them bilaterally through various forms of regional cooperation, especially in the economic and infrastructure sectors.

Focusing its diplomatic and consular activities on economic interests is among the most important priorities in the operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accordingly, separate organizational units have been established under the Ministry's authority to deal with such tasks. My colleagues and representatives of other Government's departments of economic affairs have already spoken about the economic trends and situation in Serbia.

I would therefore just like to highlight that one of the key priorities of the Government is to create a favourable environment for business and investment, as a precondition for facilitating economic growth and development. In this regard, additional efforts have been made to enact the relevant legislation conducive to creating necessary conditions for investment. In this way, administrative procedures to obtain relevant permits have been reduced to the minimum.

Moreover, the Republic of Serbia has given guarantees for foreign investments, thus significantly improving the climate for the flow of new investments into the country. A large number of free trade agreements that Serbia has concluded with a number of countries is also a chance for economic cooperation. All these potentials have been recognized by reputed companies and business people from all over the world.

On returning to your countries, we are deeply convinced that you will continue to work on the further promotion of cooperation between our countries and on promoting Serbia's economic potentials. To succeed in these efforts, you will always have our full support. At the same time, I am grateful to you for what you have done so far, especially for your commitment to the mission of an honorary consul.

I believe that this Conference will help to improve the dialogue on issues of common interest, and establish stronger bonds and cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and the countries where you carry out the important and demanding functions of honorary consuls.

We are hopeful that meetings like this will become a regular practice in our work in the future.

I wish you a pleasant and productive visit to the Republic of Serbia