



The delegation of the Republic of Serbia comprising First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Ivica Dacic, Minister of Finance Dusan Vujovic and Minister of Economy Zeljko Sertic, had talks today with some of Russian major economic partners attending the International Economic Forum.

“We had talks with Energy Minister Novak, who is co-chairing the Joint Committee for Cooperation between Serbia and the Russian Federation. I am chairing the Serbian part of the Joint Committee, while Minister Novak is chairing the Russian part. We discussed preparations for convening a session of this Committee. We noted that, last year, our foreign trade turnover was most favourable for Serbia in the last 5-6 years, reaching almost 3.5 billion dollars. Even more important is the fact that Serbian exports to Russia have increased, as opposed to the previous years, mainly in the energy sector.

On the other hand, we discussed further trade liberalization, that is, the possibility, as he put it himself, to have positive decisions of all members of the Eurasian Union, by August, concerning the liberalization of quotas for cars and cheeses made in Serbia. These exports from Serbia can be made as early as the second half of this year.

The third item discussed was the need to address in the best possible way, in the interest of Serbian nationals in particular, the issue of work permits for Serbian people working in the Russian Federation. They are frequently victims of criminal acts, i.e. employers recruiting them without legal papers, work permits, thus causing Serbian workers to violate regulations. On the other hand, Serbian workers are often left unpaid, without their salaries, having to depend on our Embassy to help them repatriate to Serbia.

Also important for us were the talks with Gasprom CEO Miller, and we reiterated our commitment to continue cooperation.

Everyone in Serbia was disappointed with the failure of the “South Stream” project into which we truly invested a lot and which was vitally important to us. At present, there are many ideas concerning diversification of gas supply routes, sources and gas distribution routes, whereas not much can be heard about locations with gas supplies.

It is necessary to bear in mind the announcement that Russian gas deliveries through Ukraine will be suspended in 2019. Unless Serbia finds an alternative route for gas supplies, it

may face a huge energy problem.

I learned two things today which are of fundamental importance.

Russia had been offered by EU officials to build a pipeline called “Eastern Ring”, that would run through Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia. In that event, Serbia would be sidestepped. I could not have imagined so much hypocrisy on the part of Brussels officials, because they had brought about the failure of the “South Stream” project.

When Russian gas was to be supplied to Serbia – that was a political problem, and when it should go to Western and northern Europe – that is an economic issue unrelated to politics.

If this is true, it calls for a serious discussion with the European Commission as to their relationship towards Serbia, the interests of Serbia and their attitude towards Serbian citizens.

We are interested and would like to hear about the further plans of Gasprom and Russia concerning the gas pipeline. I am pleased that the process of placing the pipes in the sea towards Turkey will begin in end-July.

Gasprom Chief Executive Miller will sign tomorrow with the Government of the Hellenic Republic a memorandum on establishing a joint company for the distribution of gas. This indicates that it now seems realistic that one of the routes, that is, the one for which we believe should best run through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia and Serbia to Hungary and Austria, would be the continuation of the project that we started with the Russian Federation earlier on. We have already established joint companies and, in that respect, Serbia has gone further than any other country.

Political issues will be discussed tomorrow with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin will address the Economic Forum participants, as well,” stated the Serbian Foreign Minister.