



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 highlighted the major activities for the previous month and announced the Ministry's further plans for the coming month.

"The most intensive diplomatic activity was certainly in New York, during the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, during which I participated in the high-level meeting "Protecting Cultural Heritage – an Imperative for Humanity"; a working lunch of SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs; at the high-level meeting "Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements under the New Development Agenda"; Leaders' Summit on UN Peacekeeping; Informal Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organized by Romania as the current Chair; at the UN Security Council Ministerial level Open Debate on safeguarding peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa and countering terrorist threats in the region, presided over by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov; Trilateral meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey; a working breakfast of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Western Balkans with Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, as well as the side-event on OSCE Peace Operations which I chaired.

During this year's annual UN General Assembly Session, I also had meetings with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Ri Su Yong, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Foreign Minister of Armenia Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine Ryad al-Malki, Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Ernal Abdyl daev, Foreign Minister of Fiji Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and my Argentine colleague Hector Timerman, as well the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. In addition to these official meetings, there was a considerable number of shorter bilateral meetings (with Mozambique and Ethiopia).

Participation in these numerous high-level side events, held at the UN during the general

debate, and the bilateral meetings were aimed at presenting the positions of the Republic of Serbia on key issues of international importance and our own priority national interests.

As regards Kosovo's application for admission to UNESCO membership, I underlined that Serbia cannot tolerate any vandalism against cultural monuments. We are unfortunately witnessing ever more frequent destruction and desecration of Serbian historical cultural heritage.

In the context of migrants, I emphasized that Europe has been faced, on a daily basis, with a large number of people coming from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and particularly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, fleeing brutal wars and violence, looking for safety and hoping to find solidarity, protection and a better life. We are witnessing the most massive population movements in Europe since WWII, entailing serious challenges faced not only by their countries of origin, but also transit countries and those of their intended destination.

Serbia is one of the countries on the major transit route of the big wave of migrants displaced by war. Thousands of people are using the Balkan route heading to EU countries. From the beginning of this year to mid-September, more than 170,000 migrants have crossed the Serbian state border. Although Serbia is not the country of their intended destination, as they are heading for EU Member States and some migrants are coming from these countries, for Serbia this is a new challenge, and a highly complex one. In facing it, Serbia has demonstrated and continues to consistently demonstrate responsibility and constructiveness, as well as the readiness to seek a solution together with its European partners.

It is clear that immediate and concerted international efforts are needed, particularly those aimed at addressing crises and putting an end to conflicts in the countries of origin. It is not possible to expect an adequate, coherent and comprehensive response to the migration crisis that we are facing, focused on the root causes of the underlying problems without an active dialogue, supported by the international community, aimed at resolving the crises in these countries. The only appropriate and effective solution would be to stabilize the crisis areas by working with the greatest possible determination to find long-term solutions and to create conditions for the return of refugees and migrants.

It is not possible to reach a solution by taking partial and local steps, such as closing borders or building fences, but through cooperation and coordination on the levels of the EU and the international community as a whole. This Ministry has reacted on several occasions last month, after Hungary and Croatia closed their border-crossings with Serbia. In both cases, the situation escalated, circumventing the relevant EU standards. Erecting a physical barrier or implementing measures on the part of the Croatian authorities, thus banning holders of Serbian passports and vehicles with Serbian number plates from entering Croatia at Serbia – Croatia border-crossing points, have not helped to stabilize the region, but have only undermined the fundamental principles of the European Union and the international community.

Serbia has demonstrated its readiness at all levels, within the limits of its capabilities, to face the situation and take the responsibility to do its part of the job, which was positively assessed by the EU and world-wide. In this context, I called on our more developed partners and the EU in particular, asking for solidarity, assistance and support, including financial support because,

despite the demonstrated good will and readiness to bear its share of burden and responsibility, Serbia cannot deal with this problem on its own.

This month, I had a meeting with the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, and also with Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Norway Berge Brende, which was unfortunately a very brief one, since the visit was interrupted by the Minister's need to promptly return to Oslo due to the fact that members of the Islamic State had kidnapped a Norwegian national. The Norwegian Foreign Minister announced that his country would provide assistance to Serbia and Macedonia amounting to some 6.5 million euro, half of which will be allocated for strengthening refugee reception centres in Serbia before the winter, whereas the other half will be intended for humanitarian assistance to Serbia and Macedonia. The Norwegian humanitarian aid will be channelled through the United Nations, the Red Cross organization and relevant NGOs.

Additionally, activities aimed at further visa liberalisation are in progress, particularly with Latin American states. Conclusion of agreements on visa liberalisation for holders of all types of passports has been initiated with Venezuela, Panama, Paraguay, Guatemala, Columbia and Jamaica; and some Asian countries. Agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the exemption of visas for holders of diplomatic and official passports were adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, on 19 September 2015, and are ready for signature during the first bilateral contacts with the above-mentioned countries; and with ASEAN countries. Agreements on the abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic and official passports are ready to be signed with Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia. The text of the agreement on the abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic and official passports with Myanmar has also been agreed. Harmonization of the text of the Agreement on the abolition of visas on diplomatic and official passports with the Philippines, and the Agreement with Malaysia on the abolition of visas on all types of passports is underway. Agreements on the abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic and official passports with Lebanon and Georgia are in the process of ratification in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The visa liberalisation process is continued in line with the foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia and the negotiation process with the EU. At present, nationals of the Republic of Serbia may enter and stay without a visa in 63 states world-wide, whereas visas are required for 131 countries.

As regards the forthcoming activities in October, I will participate, on 5 October, in the meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee in Geneva where, in addition to presenting the country's national priorities – reaching durable solutions to the problems of a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Serbia – I will address the current problem of migrants, both from national and international aspects.

The Conference on Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes will be held on 8 October in Luxemburg. EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini announced that a Western Balkans Conference will be take place in Luxemburg, with the participation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Home Affairs from EU Member States, the Western Balkan and Turkey. Discussions will focus primarily on migrant crisis management and migrant reception.

Preparations are well underway for organizing the 22nd OSCE Ministerial Council, to be held in Belgrade on 3-4 December.

Preparations are also in progress for the visit of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic to the Russian Federation where he will have meetings with the country's highest officials", stated Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic