



Adress by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the Informal Meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (GYMNICH) in Amsterdam:

Mr. Chairman,  
Madam High Representative,  
Ministers,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Chairman, Mr. Koenders, and the High Representative/Vice President, Madam Mogherini, for the invitation, offering us yet another opportunity to exchange views and share experiences concerning the migration crisis.

A year ago, hardly anyone could have anticipated that the potential migratory wave caused by the wars in the Middle East, Syria in particular, could escalate into an exodus of the population, unseen in Europe since World War II. Serbia is a transit country for almost all migrants and refugees fleeing from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other unstable areas, heading to Western and Northern Europe, due to the fact that it is situated at the very centre of the Western Balkan migration route. In 2015 Serbia registered, took in and sheltered 600,000 migrants, almost 26 times as many as throughout 2014, and the number could increase further in the course of this year. In comparison, in this year alone, 63.000 irregular migrants have entered the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Out of total number of migrants recorded, only 600 applied for asylum in Serbia.

Although no-one can say at this point how long this trend will last, we all know that this crisis is not a transient one. Given the specifics of the current migrant crisis and the fact that the migratory wave has not slowed down during the winter months, I need to underscore again the importance of early notification system for any new measure applied in the countries of final destination, so that all countries along the route are timely informed about regime change at the border and are able to adapt.

This would create a particularly dangerous situation for Serbia and the entire region, if there was a chain reaction and a drastic reduction in passage through or closing of borders, which would halt the flow of migrants and cause their massive and longer delays in the territory of

Serbia, putting an enormous strain on us. After the Western Balkans route Leaders' Meeting, Serbia expressed its readiness to provide temporary housing for several thousand migrants, in case of a need. We managed, by using our own funds, to equip additional accommodation facilities for 3,000 people, and we are trying to do the same for another 3,000 if provided with concrete financial support by the EU. That is more than what certain EU member states have offered.

I would like to remind you that Serbia is the only non EU country that has deployed 20 members of the Ministry of Interior to the Macedonian-Greek border and expressed the intention to increase this number. The Serbian government donate to children of Syria EUR 500,000 through UNICEF, at a high-level donor conference held in London two days ago. During the entire crisis we have been predictable and credible partner of the European Union and we will continue to be one in the future.

In spite of all our understanding and the empathy we feel for those who have embarked upon such a long, difficult and uncertain journey, hoping for a better life, we cannot allow the entire burden be put on us or Serbia be turned into a kind of a collective centre, a parking lot for migrants. Serbia is also not in a position to receive back the migrants who have transited through our territory, but did not get asylum in the EU, due to the fact that we neither have the capacity nor the resources, nor we are the first country of entry.

Against this background, it is of paramount importance for Serbia as an EU candidate state, a transit country along the Western Balkans route, and a country bearing a huge burden of the migrant crisis – that the EU adopts a uniform position and agrees on comprehensive solution, encompassing common measures and activities to respond to the biggest challenge of our century in an appropriate and effective way. We also believe that it is essential to commence immediately with the implementation of measures to be agreed upon, for there is no time to waste. We can expect an even larger flow of migrants as early as this spring.

I see this meeting as a good opportunity to get first-hand information about the specific preparation of the future plan of the European Union to reduce the migratory pressure. For its part, Serbia is ready to take part and to make a contribution to this process, as well as to accept and follow any comprehensive, sustainable and agreed solution, in the interest of all, including us in the Balkans. Although Serbia is not an EU member state, we will be ready to accept even the share of burden within the system of quotas, and to accept a certain number of migrants, provided we reach mutually acceptable solution with the EU and provided those people express intention to permanently stay in Serbia.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Allow me, at the end, to once again ask for your support in regard to acceleration of our negotiating process during 2016. First and foremost, I most kindly ask you to approve OBAR for Chapter 23, since it is a precondition to keep the pace of the planned dynamics and to open Chapters 23 and 24 during the Dutch Presidency of the EU. Those Chapters are not only very important for the overall reform process, but some of their segments have a direct bearing on the current migration issues. Serbia's conduct in the current migratory crisis may give the best

picture of the maturity of our institutions and our readiness to respect the rule of law. We are working intensively to finalize preparations for the opening of five more chapters (5, 13, 20, 25, 26), and we hope that in 2016, the majority, if not all of them, will be opened.

Thank you for your attention.