



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic talked today in Moscow with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov.

Ministers Dacic and Lavrov discussed Kosovo, the current political situation, the refugee crisis and the thousands of migrants transiting Serbia on their way to the West.

At the press conference that followed the meeting, the two Ministers agreed that all-round relations between Russia and Serbia were developing successfully in all areas.

Minister Dacic pointed out that Russia was one of Serbia's chief strategic partners, and that Belgrade was grateful to Moscow for the support regarding Kosovo, lent in international organizations.

"If it were not for Russia, Serbia would be in a much more difficult situation when it comes to Kosovo", the Minister said.

Minister Dacic emphasized that the relations between Serbia and Russia were developing successfully in all areas.

"We plan to further develop our bilateral relations and prepare to sign several bilateral agreements and memoranda", the Minister said.

Minister Lavrov underlined that he and Minister Dacic discussed the situation in the Balkans, particularly in the light of the migrant crisis.

"We know that Serbia is under pressure", Minister Lavrov said.

"We will provide assistance to Serbia, in order to help it overcome the problem", the Russian Foreign Minister stated.

The Russian Foreign Minister assessed that Moscow and Belgrade were developing a

successful cooperation in political, economic, military and technical areas.

"We are appreciative of the essential political dialogue", Minister Lavrov said, recalling the visits made by the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic and President Tomislav Nikolic to Moscow, in October 2015 and March 2016 respectively.

"Furthermore, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Mr. Dmitry Medvedev, received an invitation to visit Serbia", the Russian Foreign Minister said.

Mr. Lavrov added that the Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation was maintaining an intensive work, while military and technical cooperation were also being developed, a subject that Minister Dacic discussed with Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Dmitry Rogozin and Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation Sergei Shoigu.

"The process of European integration and cooperation with NATO belong in the matters of Serbia's sovereignty", Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said today.

"We treat these subjects as a sovereign right of our Serbian friends, our Serbian strategic partners", Lavrov said, adding that it was vital for the EU not to impose its position in the process of developing its relations with potential candidates and make them choose between the EU and Russia, on the basis of the "either Russia or the EU" formula.

"Serbia's relationship with NATO is a sovereign right of Serbia. We know that Serbia, like many other countries which did not join the Alliance, participate in many of its activities, including the military exercises", Minister Lavrov said, adding that Russia was ready to renew its relations with the Alliance, solely on an equal footing.

Minister Lavrov said that he "sees nothing unusual" in the recently ratified and signed NATO-Serbia agreement.

Minister Dacic said that the issue of NATO membership was not being raised in Serbia, and that the Serbian people did not want it, adding that Serbia had opted for military neutrality, and that when it came to its cooperation with the Alliance, it would remain at the level of the Partnership for Peace programme.