



As an Envoy of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic met today in Vojvodina with Croatian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miro Kovac at a ceremony marking the 26th anniversary of the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina.

On the occasion, Minister Dacic delivered the following address:

"Dear Hosts,

Dear High Representatives of the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina,

Distinguished fellow Minister, Mr. Kovac,

Church dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

I would like to extend my congratulations to you on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina. I would also like to welcome Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia Miro Kovac.

It is my great honour to welcome you, in my capacity as Envoy of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, to a town where he and President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic signed a Declaration on the promotion of our relations.

I hope that the implementation of this Declaration would contribute considerably to the full protection of minorities, of both the Croatian minority in the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian minority in the Republic of Croatia.

I would like to remind everyone present, as well as the public in Serbia and Croatia, that our two states as early as 2004 adopted the legal framework for the protection of minorities, a legal act, ratified in 2005 by both Serbian and Croatian Parliaments, comprising all the necessary means for a full and consistent exercise of minority rights. It was an agreement concluded between the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro and the Republic of Croatia on the protection of rights of

Serbian and Montenegrin minorities in the Republic of Croatia, as well as of the Croatian minority in Serbia.

However, the Agreement alone is not enough to achieve the state of affairs that every minority community would wish for in the territory which once was a common state.

For this reason, I have to express my immense satisfaction with a concrete political will having been accumulated, after such a long time, on both sides to initiate and intensify a top-level political dialogue, which has obviously been deadlocked over the past years.

The Republic of Serbia honours the long-standing and strong ties the Croatian minority has fostered with its kin country, the Republic of Croatia, as well as the Croatian minority's success in articulating its political goals, while also preserving its identity, culture, tradition and faith.

The Republic of Serbia is strongly committed to the high international standards for the protection of national minorities. This is reflected also in concrete instruments of financial assistance provided at the republic, provincial and municipal levels.

The overall relations between the Serbs and Croats call for intensified meetings and exchanges. They call for getting to know each other better, becoming familiar with the problems of the minorities in both states. A lack of top-level contacts, dialogue and meetings only contributes to a one-sided perception which, due to insufficient factual information, is further interpreted solely in the negative context, one that is destructive and does not serve the desired goals of either side.

Following the adoption of the Agreement, the Joint Intergovernmental Committee Monitoring the Implementation of the Agreement on the Protection of National Minorities was established and tasked to conduct dialogue and help understand the needs of either side. Six sessions have been held thus far, last of which in Zagreb and Vrhovine, the Republic of Croatia, on 22-23 October 2014. The next session should take place in the Republic of Serbia and I call on all the representatives of the Croatian community to articulate their demands also through their representatives in the Committee. Furthermore, I believe it is necessary that the Committee should meet more often, and that scheduling its sessions every three years does not represent a constructive practice.

The Republic of Serbia has been called on to come up with a solution to the issue of provision of information in minority languages, an important issue in its further EU integration process. We are aware of the situation facing the media outlets which used to broadcast content in minority languages. At this point, I have to underline that the media outlets which broadcast their programmes in minority languages used to be state-owned, and that it was the requirement of the EU that Serbia gave up such ownership. The failing privatization of certain media resulted in programmes in minority languages being taken off air. The Republic of Serbia is a responsible state, responsible with regard to the need of minorities to receive information in their own languages and it will find a solution to this problem.

The Republic of Serbia has welcomed wholeheartedly the Republic of Croatia becoming a

member of the European Union. We appreciate highly the consent given by the Republic of Croatia to the opening of chapters 23 and 24. Furthermore, we appreciate highly the technical support it provided to the Republic of Serbia through projects of the Croatian Foreign Ministry's Centre of Excellence, as well as the ongoing highly intensive cooperation in the framework of cross-border IPA projects of the European Union, aimed at inter-municipal cooperation and economic development. We hope that further support of the Republic of Croatia would have a positive effect on the development of the Republic of Serbia's border municipalities where the need to develop agriculture is an imperative.

I am truly pleased to be able to address here today the representatives of the Democratic Alliance of Croats in the Republic of Serbia. The year marking this anniversary coincides with the year when the signatures of the two countries' highest representatives have articulated the will of highest political representatives to resolve the problems and initiate cooperation. Enhancing political, social and cultural situation of the Croatian minority in Serbia is closely linked with positive developments in Serbia-Croatia relations. In addition to legislative and declarative readiness to resolve systemically the issues of vital importance for the persons belonging to national minorities and all citizens of the Republic of Serbia alike, I hope that an intensified political dialogue would contribute to the two sides reaching at a faster pace agreements on the concrete problems which are the focus of the minority communities in both states.

To you I wish a happy 26th anniversary of the establishment of the Democratic Alliance of Croats in the Republic of Serbia, wishing all the Croats living in the Republic of Serbia prosperity in our common state, which I hope would soon join the European family, contributing to a higher level of adherence to European standards with regard to not only minority issues, but all issues in the interest of all our citizens.

Cheers!"