



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic is visiting Palestine, where he met today high-ranking Palestinian officials.

The Serbian Foreign Minister met today his counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine, Riad Malki, with whom he discussed the bilateral relations between Serbia and Palestine, economic cooperation, and current international issues.

"I wish to thank my friend, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Riad Malki, who invited me to spend Christmas in Bethlehem. For me, this is a special experience that I will never forget. Today, I also met some tourists from Serbia who came to celebrate this major feast here.

My visit is yet another confirmation of the great friendship existing between Serbia and Palestine. Our relations are highly developed, we have witnessed many visits and contacts, and this should be maintained. Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic visited Palestine, while President Abbas made a return visit to Serbia.

We jointly noted a high level of understanding on the part of both Serbia and Palestine for the problems facing both countries.

We appreciate the multilateral cooperation with Palestine. Serbia had very positive stances when it comes to many issues at the international level, and it voted on many matters in the interest of Palestine. We are very grateful to Palestine for its understanding of our position regarding Kosovo.

When it comes to the relations between Israel and Palestine, we support dialogue conducive to a peaceful and lasting settlement, based on consideration of both parties' interests.

We exchanged views on the international situation, on the International Conference which will take place on 15 January in Paris, and the need for international commitment to the renewal of dialogue, negotiations and reaching a solution. We are also against double standards in the international community and imposition of unilateral solutions.

Bilaterally, we want to develop the best relations possible. We agreed to set up a Joint

Committee, headed by Minister Malki and myself, and to hold the first meeting of the Committee in Belgrade, as early as the first half of this year.

We want to develop our trading cooperation, to enable tourism to develop through the visa abolition process.

In Tito's time, thousands of foreign students studied in Yugoslavia, there are many of them here in Palestine, too, and they are assets for us. We are planning to go on with the process of granting scholarships for studies in Serbia, while there are 16 Palestinians among the current scholarship holders.

Tomorrow I will visit the tomb of Yasser Arafat, a great friend of Yugoslavia and President Tito", the Serbian Foreign Minister stated after his meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine.