



Photo: MFA of Slovenia

Dear Karl, Dear Ivo,
Distinguished Colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank you for organizing the meeting at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs together with the Process Leaders' Meeting, and to commend you for choosing the theme "A push for a more efficient EU enlargement process", which will be the subject of our discussions today.

It is of paramount importance to Serbia that the enlargement process is given as much attention as possible, irrespective of all challenges facing the EU, and the ongoing talks within the EU regarding the reforms to be undertaken. In this way, you have demonstrated that you are unambiguously interested in the region's progress on the EU path, and that "Brdo-Brijuni" is a forum where we can have frank discussions on topics of crucial importance to the Western Balkans for many years already, such as the European integration process and strengthening of meaningful regional cooperation.

European Union membership continues to be one of Serbia's top foreign policy priorities, and we are making our best efforts to ensure that the reforms, implemented in line with the EU agenda, yield best possible results. However, the fact that – despite all endeavours made over the years – we have been able to open only eight, while provisionally closing two chapters, is not encouraging because, if this dynamic continues, decades will pass before all negotiation chapters are even opened. And how long will it take before they are closed? Or, should all the EU Member States and the European Parliament ratify an Accession Treaty? Our people are losing faith that the accession process will come to an end, which is detrimental both to ourselves, and the EU which is losing its credibility.

Therefore, if the question to be raised is: "Is there a need for new commitments and additional engagements?" my answer is: "Yes, but on the part of the EU, which must clearly state whether it wants us or not". It is frequently heard that the expectations from us are no more than to meet the requirements identical to those that were imposed on other candidates, but is it quite so? The question is – if an extensive inquiry were made today, how many current EU Member States would be ready to meet the same requirements that are imposed on us.

I would like to recall that the negotiation process of Serbia, compared to that of other candidates, has been additionally burdened by indirect introduction of a third party in the negotiations, by conditioning the progress of negotiations by the progress made in the Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. With due respect for the principled position of the EU, and in the light of the developments we have witnessed in recent months – we believe that it is necessary to re-examine the approach according to which the progress achieved on Chapter 35 is a prerequisite for opening new chapters – because it takes two to tango, and Serbia, which has been carrying out reforms wholeheartedly, must not be hostage to obstructions made by others in a highly sensitive political process. We would, therefore, highly appreciate a more balanced EU approach to this issue, which would, I am convinced, result - at least in my country - in a greater amount of confidence in the European Union.

The issue of a push for a more efficient EU enlargement process is a very complex one and includes a number of other issues, such as the need for strengthening regional cooperation, stability and security in the region, resolving open issues through dialogue and for improvement of the economic potential, aiming to raise the living standards of all citizens. We need to invest additional efforts to strengthen the democratic processes leading to a lasting stability and security in the region. This, is, at the same time, a guarantee of the stability and security of Europe, of which the EU is well aware. I will be very frank with you, in Serbia, we are aware of the reality that the EU integration process is not solely a technical, but primarily a political process, however, without a clear, predictable European perspective with a defined timeframe, which was the experience of the current EU Member States in their respective processes, it is hard to expect that the region would remain stable and stay on a European course.

We are ready and committed to work intensively together with the EU in areas essential to the security of the EU itself, but of our own as well – such as migration and combating terrorism. You know that we have fully contributed to the management of migratory movements via the Western Balkan route, and have actively cooperated on finding solutions to one of the above challenges, proving to be a credible and responsible partner despite the pressure we have been exposed to for almost 2 years – namely, more than 1.4 million migrants transited Serbia and, for months now, approximately 8,000 of them have been staying in Serbia unable to leave. To us, taking such an approach is not in dispute, because we see our future in the EU. In the belief that the EU shares our view, we expect a merit-based assessment of our progress and that our contribution to the resolution of common problems be adequately valued.

We are ready to work within the region with more intensity on the enhancement of regional integration; Serbia will continue to dedicatedly do everything in its power to preserve regional stability, but I recall that these processes must not replace that of European integration, but contribute instead to a faster dynamic of our EU path.

We are aware of the numerous challenges the EU is facing, but they must not be an excuse for any delaying or lagging behind in the European integration process. On the contrary, once all the election cycles are completed by the end of the year and a decision is made on the EU reform process roadmap, the EU and its Member States should give additional impetus to us in the process of accession talks and encourage others in the region as well, by opening talks or granting candidate status. The accession process is an exceptionally complex and long one, but

it benefits either side greatly and I see no reason for the EU to hesitate in supporting us, politically and financially, in accelerating the pace of our European path.

Dear colleagues,

I have already said that the economic development of each of us individually, and of the region as a whole, is the precondition for regional stability, as well as for the EU accession process. I believe that the strengthening of economic cooperation, which is already the focus of our endeavours to create a regional economic area, and to help increase European investments in the region in particular, would be "a win-win situation" both for the WB6 and for EU investors.

In this sense, I believe that the Brdo-Brioni Process and Forum might play a significant role, by organizing events such as "Summit 100" of SEE business leaders, like the one held in the margins of the Brdo-Brioni Process Leaders' Meeting in Sarajevo on 28 and 29 May 2016.

Particularly important roles are played by the so-called Berlin Process Connectivity Agenda and enhancement of cooperation in transport and energy sectors, aimed at facilitating integration and removing the existing barriers. In this regard, we support the proposal to sign a SEE Transport Community Treaty in Trieste, whereby we will harmonize our transport policies with those of the European Union.

On this occasion, I would like to reiterate the interest of the Republic of Serbia to host the seat of the Transport Community Secretariat in Belgrade, having in mind that the South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), to be transformed into the future Transport Community, has successfully operated in Belgrade for more than 10 years now. For many obvious reasons, Belgrade is a logical choice of location, and I hope that we will have your support on this matter.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to thank our hosts for their exceptional hospitality and for the excellent organization of this meeting, and to express my belief that we will continue to meet in this format, in the future, too, and have open discussions like we did today.