



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the 128th Sessions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in Elsinor, in Denmark:

Mr. Chairman,
Fellow Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to extend my congratulations to the outgoing Chairman of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark Andres Samuelsen, on his highly successful Chairmanship and my wishes to the incoming Chair, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia Marija Pejčinović Burić, for success in the discharge of these important duties.

We see the 128th Session of the Council of Europe at Ministerial level as an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the main current issues and challenges we are facing in Europe and within the Organization. In this context, the assessments made by the Secretary General in the Fifth Report on the Situation of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law are thought-provoking and raise concern with reason. The Secretary General has rightly underlined the pressing problems and adverse trends in many areas, of which no country has been spared. It is particularly for this reason that our common approach to their solution is vital.

We support the proposals of the Secretary General towards seeking solutions to the ongoing crisis in the Organization and joint consideration of the role and objectives of the Council of Europe, aimed at achieving greater unity in Europe.

Serbia welcomes the approach focused on strengthening the unity and coordination of the two major Council of Europe statutory bodies – the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, and is committed to finding constructive, transparent and pragmatic solutions. We support the Secretary General's engagement in addressing the crisis, and the dialogue among all participants in accordance with the Council of Europe principles. In this context, we are in favour of changing the PACE rules of procedure, in order to ensure equitable participation of all member States in this body, which our parliamentarians have already proposed within the framework of the relevant Ad hoc Committee of the PACE Bureau.

We welcome the fact that Croatia has identified protection of persons belonging to national minorities among its Committee of Ministers Chairmanship priorities, and we are determined to actively contribute to the implementation of this goal. Serbia attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of national minorities. We are strongly committed to continuing - in cooperation with the Council of Europe – our engagement along these lines. At the same time, we expect that all rights of persons belonging to the Serbian national minority in neighbouring countries will be fully respected in line with the Council of Europe standards, including the right to use their own language and script.

Serbia is committed to protecting and promoting standards and values enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). We support the conclusions of the Secretary General's Report concerning the need to improve the effectiveness of the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. We welcome the contribution of Denmark to the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration, which we see as an important accomplishment of the Danish Committee of Ministers Chairmanship, significant for the future functioning of the European Court of Human Rights.

Serbia attaches great importance to the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of the media, which are key to democratic processes. We further attach great importance to freedom of assembly and association, as guaranteed by the constitution and relevant legislation. Serbia has devoted much attention to ensuring an enabling environment for greater participation of the civil society organizations in the decision-making process at all levels.

At national level, a series of measures have been taken towards fulfilling the recommendations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) related to Serbia. To that end, a coordinating team has been set up, tasked with overseeing the activities aimed at the implementation of recommendations contained in the GRECO report.

We believe the implementation of the recommendations made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) is of great importance. Comprehensive measures have been taken in order to guarantee compliance with the Committee's standards and the rights of prisoners held in institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions. At the same time, we expect appropriate reaction of the CPT with regard to the brutal assault on the Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Mr. Marko Djuric on 26th March. Mr. Djuric was subjected to torture and humiliating treatment by the police in Kosovska Mitrovica.

With the aim of improving protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, Serbia supports the continuation of the engagement of the Council of Europe in Kosovo and Metohija, in full compliance with the UNSC Resolution 1244 and status-neutral approach. We are convinced that the Council of Europe activities are important for effective protection of human rights and minority rights, rule of law and cultural heritage. At the same time, we solely find acceptable a status neutral engagement of the Organization and full compliance with the UNSC resolution 1244. Accordingly, Serbia will most strongly oppose any attempt at launching the procedure for admission of the so-called „Kosovo" to the Council of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.