



The address of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic at the ceremony of handing over the keys of 40 apartments to refugees in Sremska Mitrovica:

"Dear guests.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am greatly pleased that we have gathered here today almost a year and a half after we jointly laid a foundation for the construction of 40 apartments, on 17 March last year. For me personally, this day has a symbolic meaning since evokes pleasant memories of a great success that we have jointly achieved in such a short period of time. This civil engineering and urbanistic triumph will enable people to build their lives on totally new foundations. I would like to point to the fact that these 40 apartments represent first housing units from Sub-project II of the Regional Housing Program and that is exactly what makes me proud of our today's success. And not only that. These apartments will be made available to the most socially vulnerable segment of our population, to our fellow nationals who are refugees and who are facing special problems and most difficult challenges in life.

The construction of 40 apartments on this site was partly financed by the Fund of Regional Housing Program, in the amount of 680 thousand EURO and also in large part by a generous contribution of the town of Sremska Mitrovica. I would like to express special gratitude to its Mayor Vladimir Sanader since this municipality made the land available for these apartments including necessary infrastructure, in total value of approximately 14.5 million RSD.

I would like to recall that within Sub-project II, we are currently building 200 apartments in nine cities. The situation varies at these construction sites – flats are in different construction phases: it is either due to start, or the keys for some flats are to be given out soon, while in some cases it will happen in a few months. But we are certainly getting there. Other types of housing solutions under the subproject valued at more than 13 million EUR are almost completely finished – 250 village houses were bought off in 20 units of local self-government, 120 prefabricated houses were built in 28 units of local self-government and 9 Belgrade municipalities and most of the 330 packages of construction material were delivered.

I would like to take this opportunity to indicate the importance and our commitment to resolving the refugee issue. First of all, it is a longstanding, arduous and complex process, but not an impossible one, as we can see today. I think that we all agree that refugees who were forced to

leave their homes in the end of last century throughout former Yugoslavia, deserve certainty and life in dignity after more than 20 years living as refugees and living conditions unworthy of men in the 21 century. That is why the Government of the Republic of Serbia along with other partners remains firmly committed to and engaged in implementing the Regional Housing Program which will ensure housing for 6000 families in Serbia. So far, 2000 have been provided for.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia invests huge resources and efforts in order to help all displaced persons. That is a complex task because in addition to refugees from former SFRY more than 200 thousand IDPs from Kosovo and Metohija found refuge in Serbia.

We should not lose sight that ensuring housing is not enough in itself, since the goal is to ensure the sustainability of the Program. First of all, I refer to social and economic conditions for a sustainable return or integration of refugees in society. That is why consider that it is very important that all participating states in the Program should fully implement the Sarajevo process. Successful implementation of the Program and good cooperation of the regional countries add to the importance of the Regional Housing Program. It transcends state borders and demonstrates that by cooperation and joint efforts, if there is will, sustainable and lasting solutions for the needs of the refugees can be found.

In the end, I would like to thank in particular all those who recognized the importance of the Program and contributed to its development and progress – European Union, USA, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, Turkey, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Hungary and all other donors whose names I would not like to omit. Of particular importance is the support of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and OSCE to the implementation of the Program. The role of the Council of Europe Development Bank in managing Trust Fund is unavoidable.

I am proud of all participants in the implementation of the Regional Housing Program and I hope that in the period ahead we shall take part in many more events like this.

I wish you a lot of happiness and success.