



Address delivered by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the construction of apartments for refugees in Veternik, as part of implementation of sub-project 5 of the Regional Housing Program in the Republic of Serbia:

"Ladies and gentlemen,
Participants of the Regional Housing Program,
Dear friends,

It gives me pleasure to address you and thank you for joining us in Veternik today to mark the official beginning of construction of apartments to address the housing needs of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently residing in the territory of the city of Novi Sad.

I would like to recall that the construction of housing units in Veternik represents a part of implementation of the Regional Housing Program as the most important regional initiative to reach durable solutions to the long-standing problems of persons displaced by conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1991-1995 period, with the support of international organizations and donors. The Republic of Serbia is committed and fully contributes to the implementation of undertaken obligations as exemplified by our today's participation in the founding stone ceremony in Veternik.

The construction of the apartment building in Veternik is implemented within subproject 5 of the Regional Housing Program. Total value of the works is close to 6.4 million EUR (6,356,987.55 EUR). Once the works are completed in November 2019, there will be 276 new flats, with total floor area of 19,877.30 m².

It should be noted that we shall purchase additional 30 apartments for refugees in the area of the city of Novi Sad in the forthcoming period. Moreover, designs are underway for 152 housing units in Futog and additional 94 housing units in Veternik. Overall, the Regional Housing Program in the area of Novi Sad will provide 615 accommodations for refugees – 552 housing units, 30 village houses, 13 prefab homes and 20 packages of building material.

In addition to providing housing, I would like to point to the importance of sustainability of the Program in the context of extending assistance to the displaced – the victims of war and persecution - so that they may be fully integrated in their new local communities. That is why Serbia is pursuing a responsible policy of solidarity and understanding for predicament of displaced persons.

A local community is an important factor in the process of integration without whose support successful resolution of this complex problem can be hardly expected. I take pride in stating that all local communities in Serbia, without an exception, demonstrated solidarity and extended a helping hand when the going was tough, the same as today they support all efforts towards human integration, including through the Regional Housing Program. Let me recall that in 1996 as many as 46,169 refugees and war-affected persons were registered in Novi Sad while according to present statistics, there are 2,478 refugees and 4,121 internally displaced persons.

Having said that, allow me to express special gratitude to Mayor Milos Vucevic and the City Council of Novi Sad for their support to the implementation of the Regional Housing Program as well as to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration headed by Commissioner Vladimir Cucic for their efforts and dedication.

Last but not least, let me also thank many donor countries for their pledges to the Regional Housing Program Fund and numerous international organizations included in the Program's implementation, which made the Regional Housing Program possible and contributed to its progress and viability. The results achieved so far encourage us to follow through until the Program's successful conclusion. Its full implementation adds to improved cooperation and communication among the regional countries. I trust that with our dedication and cooperation all outstanding questions from the past can be resolved together, thus contributing to the process of reconciliation, progress and regional stability.

I hope that the future beneficiaries of the Program, and I thank them for their patience, will have more fulfilling lives in this prosperous municipality. I am proud of all beneficiaries and participants in the Regional Housing Program and I am confident that this year will be as successful as the last.

Thank you for your attention."