



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic met today in Belgrade with Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Maria Zakharova, who is on a visit to Serbia at his invitation.

At a joint press conference held after the meeting, Minister Dacic reiterated Serbia's firm commitment to developing relations with the Russian Federation on the basis of strategic partnership, adding that historical, traditional close ties existed between the two peoples and countries and that their relations had always been nothing but friendly.

The Minister expressed his profound gratitude to Russia for the support it offered to Serbia in defence of its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

"Whenever Serbia needs assistance and support in the international arena, high-level representatives of the Russian Federation are the first we can go to. President Aleksandar Vucic has maintained regular contact with Russian President Vladimir Putin, so have I with my counterpart Sergey Lavrov, and we continuously inform them of all the issues and problems we are facing. Namely, our dialogue with Pristina, Serbia's positions, including the firm position concerning non-recognition of the independence of "Kosovo", further activity towards preventing "Kosovo's" admission to international organizations, which we consider as roundabout attempts by "Kosovo" to join the UN system", Dacic said.

The Minister also underlined that it was very important that there was a two-way line of communication with Moscow, allowing the two countries to share information, consult with and help each other.

"In this context, it is significant that we have continuity of top-level meetings. Later this year we expect President Putin to visit Serbia, to be preceded by a session of the Joint Committee on Cooperation co-chaired by myself, on the Serbian side, and by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Borisov, on their side. It is our expectation that a session of the Committee will be held a few weeks prior to the visit by President Putin."

The Serbian Foreign Minister recalled that the current year marked the 180th anniversary of the establishment of Serbia-Russia diplomatic relations and stressed that Serbia would never

threaten or undermine its brotherly and friendly relations with Moscow.

"I am personally very glad that Maria Zakharova accepted the invitation to visit Serbia, and this is yet another step further towards the strengthening of our friendly relations."

Ms. Zakharova said that she was pleased with the visit to Serbia and thanked Minister Dacic for the invitation. She underlined that the visit took place in the framework of regular consultations held between the two Ministries, that she had consultations in the field of public diplomacy, as well as that a goal of the visit was also to bring the two countries and peoples closer together.

Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova underlined that Russia's position concerning Kosovo was consistent and based on international law, the respect for Serbia's sovereignty and its national legislation.

Minister Dacic personally thanked Ms. Zakharova for her readiness to respond to our queries and calls without exception, and lend us a helping hand in resolving contentious issues. Furthermore, he expressed deep gratitude for her exceptionally friendly attitude to our country and people, and for the support she extended to Serbia in her official capacity.