



Keynote address by First Deputy Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilica Dacic at the Conference entitled "Western Balkan Security Challenges and Serbia":

"Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to attend this Conference again, a year later, and I wish to thank Mrs. Aleksandra Joksimovic for kindly inviting me to be the keynote speaker and to give an impetus to deliberations on the issues that will be topic of discussion at the forthcoming panels. I would also like to thank the US Ambassador in Serbia, Mr. Scott, for the support of his Embassy and for his personal contribution to make this event happen.

At a time when the world has been integrating more than ever before, when many former borders have come down and when Serbia and the Western Balkans share the destiny of the rest of the globe with regard to facing the security challenges, transnational problems need to have transnational response which includes international cooperation, coordination of activities, strengthening of confidence and, in a word, a true partnership on all levels. In that context, Serbia has demonstrated readiness and ability and asserted in practice that, as a credible partner, it shares the responsibility and the burden in tackling such challenges. There are many examples of this, from its membership of the Global Coalition Against DAESH and participation in different UN- and EU-led missions and operations, through humanitarian approach to migrant crisis, contribution to international fora with regard to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to active support to the UN system and multilateralism, being the best instrument for solving disputes and eliminating potential conflicts.

Starting from the fact that security is the key precondition for economic and any other progress and that there is no stable region if tensions prevail in any part of it, Serbia advocates and actively works to address, without delay and in an open manner, all outstanding issues which could be a source of destabilization. We would like all our neighbours and partners in the region to adopt the same approach because, unfortunately, we do not always get a proper response to our openness and willingness to solve problems with full respect of equality and mutual understanding.

For a longer period of time, Serbia has undoubtedly been the pillar of stability in this part of Europe. This has been the outcome of the strategic orientation of the incumbent Government

and its deep conviction that without stability both in Serbia and the region other important goals cannot be achieved, primarily economic and development ones. Serbia is committed to full security and stability of the region and therefore it encourages others to aspire to common interests, to make the regional connectivity as strong as possible and not to accentuate just the differences and make attempts at settling them unilaterally, often by the use of force and with unpredictable outcome.

Regional cooperation is on the ascending line but a step forward made is often followed by a few steps back. Examples of resurgence of nationalism, radicalization of political stage, affirmation of the ideologies of the past, particularly those defeated in the WWII, insisting on interests of one side to be achieved at the expense of the interests of the other side and making of unilateral moves, putting into jeopardy the hard-won regional stability and cooperation, giving way to increasing tensions. Solving the problems of the past is a long-lasting, painstaking and often excruciating process, but I am strongly convinced that the alternative to it is not the way leading to stability.

I would like to draw your attention this time again to one of the key issues of regional security, that of Kosovo and Metohija, which is certainly one that covers many of our priorities. In addition to that, Kosovo and Metohija is also the biggest security challenge for Serbia that many concrete security threats stem from. As to the terrorism issue, I wish to underline that the largest number of foreign fighters in DAESH and other terrorist organizations come from the Province. There is an organized crime constituting also the jeopardy facing the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija and a threat to our cultural and historical heritage.

Serbia has put a lot of effort into reaching the Brussels Agreements, and it has implemented these agreements consistently because it had a very strong motivation to find ways to ensure systemic, institutionalized protection of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija. That is the task of the community/association of Serbian municipalities but it has not been established due to obstructions by Pristina, and therefore the support of the international community is of crucial importance for the success of the dialogue.

Serbia stands ready to seek a compromise solution together with the Albanian side in Kosovo and Metohija and it is fully committed to this goal. It turned out that the stance of the countries which recognized the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and Metohija, stating that "the issue of Kosovo was resolved" and that the recognition by Serbia was the only possible outcome of the "normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina", was wrong. This position actually paved the way for the Pristina side not to step away from its maximalist position.

Naturally, a solution is not on the table yet but it should be sought with patience while the very possibility of having discussions on the compromise is a visible progress in understanding the positions taken by Serbia in an inexorable and persistent manner all these years. The idea of delimitation is an option clearly pointed to by President Vucic though at this very moment it cannot be fully defined because it is yet to be negotiated. I mentioned delimitation in previous years several times as the only option that could lead to a viable solution provided it were the outcome of an understanding reached by the two sides.

The position maintained in one part of the international community, that borders in the Western Balkans may not be changed, is hypocritical and irresponsible. It is no other than the Serbian borders that had been changed by Pristina's unilateral acts and illegal secession supported by many in the international community, while violating the norms of international law. Therefore, a Serbian-Albanian compromise on Kosovo and Metohija backed by the international community would not imply Pandora's box being opened, for that very proverbial box had already been cracked wide open by certain countries' recognition of Pristina's unilateral declaration of independence. It is unilateral acts that wreak havoc, and not two parties to a dispute legitimately negotiating a compromise solution, aiming to eliminate a source of instability long-term.

The situation today is such that the main stakeholders in the international community are ready to support a solution should Belgrade and Pristina come up with and agree on one. And this is the principle applied. Sadly, this is interpreted as a matter of whether there should be a change of borders or not. Such approach is missing the point altogether because, as we speak of Kosovo and Metohija, a change of borders is what compelled some to recognize Kosovo and Metohija. And if "Kosovo" was indeed a sui generis case, then it needs to be resolved in a unique way, too. In this context, it is important to underline that the US, France, the European Commission, Russia, Italy and Austria have publicly expressed in our contacts their support to the process aimed at reaching a peaceful and lasting solution. The United Kingdom and Germany continue to adhere to the policy of no change of borders. Serbia tends to be agreeable to such a position too – but the conundrum is to which case exactly this is to be applied. Should it be applied starting from Serbia's case or the case of "Kosovo"? If it was relevant to Serbia's situation – how could have someone changed its borders then? And if it was not relevant for the case of Serbia, it is hypocritical to refer to it as relevant to "Kosovo".

An agreement is what we wish for, and I am confident that there would be no obstacles, if Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement, which has been discussed on several occasions, including by President Vucic who, as you know, has a good relationship with Chancellor Merkel, as well as with the UK, and that there is no reason for any opposition to a settlement. What concerns me more is whether Pristina is capable of reaching, or even willing to reach, an agreement, or is it that they just want Presevo, Bujanovac and whatever they can get for themselves? However, I remind you again that we are a long way from any details, but the very idea of talks is good. We need to talk, negotiate and, above all, seek a sustainable solution. Proposals that are not sustainable are of no help.

As far as European integration is concerned, EU membership remains our strategic goal, even though its pace does not reflect the efforts made by Serbia.

We are deeply confident, and we will continue to be its main advocate, that pursuing the policy of European integration is the best guarantee of regional stability to the countries of the region. We have clearly demonstrated such orientation by taking an active part in the concepts of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). We are not holding out until this becomes our commitment once we enter the EU, but we share the burden instead in solidarity with the EU Member States, confident that security is a field that knows no borders or memberships of any kind. By participating in EU- and UN-mandated peace missions and operations as well as the EU Battlegroup concept, while planning to take part in civilian missions as well, Serbia has

shown its commitment to making a tangible contribution to global, European and regional security, as well as to the respect of international law, thus further affirming that it is Europe-orientated. All of the above activities are also a token of mutual trust and readiness to share responsibility.

Even though Serbia, as you know, pursues the policy of military neutrality this is no impediment to promoting our cooperation with NATO, which, for its part, fully respects such a policy of Serbia's and makes efforts towards a deepened cooperation.

Cooperation with NATO in the framework of Partnership for Peace programme is closely linked with Serbia's bilateral relations with NATO Members in many areas with scope for their improvement and further development. In line with its interests, Serbia has developed security cooperation with other major global stakeholders, such as the Russian Federation, China and others, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

In the twelve years since it joined the NATO PfP programme, Serbia has had substantial cooperation with NATO member and partner states, thus contributing to the modernization and strengthening of our armed forces and defence capacities. The role played by the NATO mission in Kosovo and Metohija is of particular importance to Serbia, and it is our hope that KFOR will remain there in an undiminished scope. We believe that our position against the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into a "Kosovo Army" will be accepted, and we appreciate in particular NATO's guarantees that the so-called Kosovo Security Force would not have access to northern Kosovo. This is essential for the implementation of the Brussels Agreement.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that Serbia will host two military exercises in October this year: 1) "Regex 2018" command-staff exercise with computer simulations, to include participation of representatives from the armed forces of both NATO partner countries and parties to partner programmes; and 2) a disaster consequence management field exercise, co-organized with the NATO Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC).

By doing so, we prove to be a reliable and credible security partner, and Serbia will continue to contribute to regional, European and global security in the future as well, to the best of its abilities and, naturally, in line with its own and common interests.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you productive deliberations at this event."