



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic participated in Timisoara, today, at the conference "Security Challenges in the Balkans". Minister Dacic opened the conference together with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania Teodor Milescanu.

"It is my pleasure to be here today and have the opportunity to open this conference - together with my esteemed colleague and friend Minister Milescanu, which, I am confident, will offer answers to at least some problems shared by all of us in the region.

To speak about the Balkans and Europe, today, it is not an easy task. My friend Milescanu talked about the developments in Romania in 1989. Twenty-nine years later, Romania is in the EU, while most of the former Yugoslavia is still waiting at the door. What happened?

We have seen the dissolution, an uncontrolled dissolution, of Yugoslavia, for which primary responsibility lies with the international community. Yugoslavia comprised 6 nations and 6 federal units. Instead of ensuring a controlled modelling of Yugoslavia's dissolution, the international community allowed for unilateral acts to be made by individual actors, and recognized them. As a result, a seventh unit that never existed before – Kosovo, which unilaterally declared independence, was recognized. The European Union acted like Tibetan philosophers. It neither offered solutions nor initiatives...

Today, when we discuss the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, you tell us that solutions reached should not affect others, you forget that the adopted solutions ruined the territorial integrity of Serbia.

The EU says that there should be no change of borders, but what about the borders of Serbia? First they destroyed them, allowing no further change of borders. This is unacceptable to us, even if coming from Brussels, Washington or Moscow.

When Catalonia wants to break away, that is impermissible, but when Kosovo wants to act likewise – that is acceptable. This is unfair.

Let us recall that it has been a centenary since the end of the First World War. The former Yugoslavia was created based on Serbia's victory in the Great War where it had lost a third of its population.

We were bombed by NATO to enable the creation of Kosovo as a state. Do you think that we are going to join NATO? We are not, nor are we going to join an Eastern bloc if anything like that exists.

It is still our desire to reach a compromise in Kosovo. Serbia came into being in Kosovo, Serbia's first capital was there, and the Serbian Patriarchy is there. Kosovo was the battleground where the famous battle against Ottoman Turks was fought, which defended Europe. We were under the Turkish rule for five centuries. They expelled Serbs and brought Islamized Albanians, thus changing the population structure. In the 14th century, Serbia's capital was in Kosovo. That capital was Prizren, where only 23 Serbs are living today. What else is that than an ethnic cleansing...If churches are destroyed, if fire is set to monasteries, if cemeteries are devastated, how can that be acceptable to us?

We are very grateful to Romania for its understanding, as it did not recognize Pristina's unilateral act. It is cynical however that countries which recognized Kosovo are speaking against change of borders.

The Balkans is fraught with problems, but these problems do not need to be grounds for war. A greater amount of understanding on the part of the international community is needed, and in those terms we are seeking to pursue a balanced foreign policy, honouring all our strategic goals.

Our strategic goal is EU membership, which is not possible before a legally-binding agreement is reached with Kosovo. Does anyone in the EU know how that agreement should read? Does that mean that Serbia should recognize Kosovo?

Romania and four other EU Member States that have not recognized Kosovo will say that this is not a requirement, whereas many others will say that it is. On the other hand, this creates a dilemma in our society – EU or Kosovo. These are big and difficult issues and those who are advocating that should have a profound understanding of that.

Particularly because the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia went uncontrolled. This was the reason for our 30-year lagging behind in relation to you, East European countries, which have all become EU Member States.

I believe that Romania's EU Presidency is highly important. Romania is our true friend and we trust that it will have a greater amount of understanding for all our problems in the region.

The 20th century was the century of Yugoslavia, a multinational state, but before that, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire were also multinational.

Serbian people does not live only in Serbia, but in another part of the region, too. After Serbia victoriously came out of World War I, it was offered an option by the Entente powers not to create Yugoslavia but to expand to the lands inhabited by Serbs. Wilson wrote that Serbia should be provided access to the sea. In the history of the White House, a foreign flag was flown over the White House only twice, the Serbian flag, a hundred years ago, and the French flag, later on. Why Serbia – because of the plight of Serbs in World War I, when it lost 40 percent of its male population. After the end of the First World War we were offered the

possibility to create Serbia including Serbs living beyond today's territory of Serbia, and we did not accept that offer. We wanted Yugoslavia, because that was sought by Croats and Slovenes, who were the first to dissolve it, later on. Therefore, the 20th century was lost for Serbia and the Serbian people.

In the post-1999 period, 200,000 Serbs were expelled from Kosovo, while 1.9 percent returned in the last 20 years. In Pristina, there were 40,000 Serbs twenty years ago, and now there are only several thousands. Is that multi-ethnic Kosovo? In Sarajevo, there were 150,000 Serbs, in 1991, and today there are only 2,000. In Croatia, there were 560,000 Serbs, in 1991, and today there are only 180,000. That was a devastating end of the 20th century for Serbia that was on the victorious side in both World Wars.

How can we impose sanctions against Russia as the core foundation for defending Serbia's territorial integrity in the United Nations? How should we understand anyone's insistence on the territorial integrity of the Crimea and Ukraine, while recognizing Kosovo?

These problems are serious and a growing number of countries are realizing that their decision to recognize Kosovo was a mistake. Pristina states that they have been recognized by 116 countries, which is not true. I spoke to representatives of most of those countries. Uganda and Nigeria are on their list of countries that have recognized Kosovo, though any reference to that is considered an offence by those counties.

I was in New York, and we were told by the US Administration to stop lobbying among countries for revocation of their recognition of Kosovo, while at the same meeting, the President of Albania urged all countries to recognize Kosovo. You must know that double standards do exist, and we know it very well.

We are in favour of peace, because of the great losses that we sustained and I very much hope that during the Romanian EU Presidency we will be able to open as many chapters as possible. Currently, the EU is faced with more serious problems than EU membership of the Western Balkan countries, but the EU is a good project for us. Regional stability is important for European stability, therefore it is necessary to seek compromises rather than accept unilateral acts.

We will not recognize Kosovo at any cost, for the issue is not either EU or Kosovo. We do not want to be asked such questions. We want a peaceful solution, and not Serbia's humiliation.

The NATO Secretary General visited Serbia yesterday, and we would like to have best possible relations with NATO, because a lot of time will elapse before it will be possible to erase the memory of NATO bombing a country that has paid such a heavy price for a free Europe. Why...Because of terror against Albanians. But what kind of a terror is that if, today, there are half as many Serbs in Kosovo than before.

Obama used to say that Palestine should not be recognized before it has reached agreement with Israel, so why did you recognize Kosovo before it has agreement with Belgrade? It is said that Kosovo is a different issue, but what kind of an issue?

Today, the Albanian people has two states, Albania and Kosovo. Do you think that anyone in

Kosovo considers themselves "Kosovars"? What is the next step? It is creation of a state at the expense of the territorial integrity of Serbia.

The word "Balkans" is made up of Turkish words blood and honey, which best reflects the Balkans, bearing in mind that there has been far more blood than honey, and I believe the time has come to change that.

Thank you."