



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Serbia Ivica Dacic at a formal reception on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the admission of the Republic of Serbia to the Council of Europe:

"Secretary General Jagland,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is my great pleasure to be able to address you today as we observe the 15th anniversary since the Republic of Serbia was admitted to the Council of Europe.

Serbia's membership in the Council of Europe brought about significant changes in the country – from the implementation of conventions, dialogue with expert bodies and benefits from their expertise, numerous projects carried out in cooperation with the Organization, promotion of human rights protection, consolidation of democracy and the rule of law followed by fundamental institutional reforms. Suffice it only to compare the Serbia of 2003 and Serbia of today to become aware of these obvious changes.

However, it is the citizens of Serbia who have benefited and continue to benefit the most from our Council of Europe membership as the country progresses in its alignment with the Organization's standards and, above all, through their access to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In this way, Serbian citizens were provided a better protection of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, while the ECHR rulings had a bearing on the changes made to the legislation, judicial practice and the activities of relevant authorities. The progress in this respect is reflected in the fact that Serbia is no longer among the countries with the highest number of complaints before the Court.

Taking into account that Serbia has complied with almost all obligations and commitments undertaken upon admission, and that it has entered the CoE Committee of Ministers'

post-monitoring procedure, we firmly believe that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) should decide to close the regular monitoring procedure at its next session.

Serbia is strongly committed to membership of the European Union as one of its foreign policy priorities. As it makes progress along its European path, Serbia continues to implement reforms related to the human rights field, democracy and the rule of law. Rest assured that we will harness all our potentials to have Serbia fully embrace core European values in all areas. As it has been the case in the past 15 years, the contribution and assistance of the Organization in this regard will be of invaluable assistance to us.

Serbia is committed to peace and further development of regional stability, as well as to the promotion of good-neighbourly relations and cooperation through dialogue. Resolution of all residual problems and misunderstandings in adherence to international law is an important element of Serbia's policy pursued in the context of relations in the region, and this has already produced significant results – mutual relations have been promoted, thus immediately contributing to the European perspective of the region.

Serbia strongly opposes possible launching of procedure for the admission of "Kosovo" to the Council of Europe. Any potential request made by Pristina to this end Serbia finds unacceptable, as that would be in clear violation of fundamental legal principles relevant to membership in international organizations, of the Statute of the Council of Europe and UNSC Resolution 1244. Serbia believes that the CoE should continue its status-neutral engagement in Kosovo and Metohija.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a few weeks' time we will mark hundred years since the end of World War I in which Serbia suffered great human and material losses. The hundredth commemoration is an opportunity for us to remind ourselves of the importance of European unity and of the prevention of divisions on our continent which in the past always led to tragic conflicts. It is therefore the obligation and responsibility of us all to overcome the differences and divisions through dialogue.

In the 70 years of its existence and various challenges notwithstanding, the Council of Europe, which came into being as a result of the aspirations towards ensuring the unity of Europe, has enabled the preservation of peace and stability on the European soil. The success and achievements of the Council of Europe are best reflected in the human rights protection system enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, which today represents the most advanced system of its kind at the global level.

Unfortunately, there is a lingering threat of new divisions that has shaken the foundations of the Council of Europe, one of the most significant pillars of the European institutional architecture. The developments at the recent October PACE session have revealed a huge gap and distrust between the two statutory bodies, which could undermine the very human rights protection system established in line with the European Convention. Serbia lends its support to the Secretary General in his efforts to solve the current institutional crisis and it stands ready to assume its share of responsibility, together with other member states.

I had the opportunity to be a member of PACE and I am currently a member of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which has given me a chance to understand even better the importance of the two bodies and of their good cooperation and communication if the goals of the Organization are to be reached. A prerequisite for such cooperation is the respect of the two bodies for their competences set forth in the Statute. I am grateful to the Legal Service for its detailed and clear analysis which should guide us past the untenable situation we have found ourselves in.

Respecting the opinion of the Legal Service ensures legal certainty which is at the heart of the rule of law.

As a member of PACE, I also had the opportunity to perceive the importance of PACE as a pan-European forum for dialogue. This is the reason I am personally convinced that all national delegations should participate, since the exclusion of any of them would imperil the unique character of the PACE and it would not be in accordance with democratic values.

I share the CoE Secretary General Jagland's optimistic opinion that finding a solution for the perhaps deepest institutional crisis the Organization has ever faced is possible. My hopes are that the Council of Europe will emerge stronger and more efficient from it because, in the light of ever more complex challenges, we need it more than ever before. Serbia, as I have already said, will take its share of responsibility.

Thank you for attending this reception, and I would like all of you to come to Serbia on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of our admission."