



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the opening ceremony of the 6th Belgrade NATO Week:

"Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to be able to open this event together with the other speakers, and at the very outset I would like to thank the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies and Ms Milic herself for their kind invitation, as well as the Public Diplomacy Division at NATO Headquarters and the United States Embassy in Belgrade, who all supported the holding of this event.

For six years already NATO Week has offered an opportunity to engage in an open and useful debate on many foreign policy and security issues of interest both to Serbia and the region and beyond. Of course, the issue of Serbia-NATO relations and the overall state of affairs in the security sector of the Western Balkans is very important and, consequently, provides, in my view, a good opportunity to shed more light on the substance of the partner cooperation between Serbia and NATO, on the results achieved thus far and the future actions aimed at improving regional stability and at maintaining lasting peace.

We know that the relations between Serbia and NATO are delicate and burdened with the legacy of the past, reflected in the launching of airstrikes against the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia without the authorization of the UN Security Council, with civilian victims and huge material destruction. We have differing views on this and that is a reality. At the same time, I wish to underline that we have both the obligation and responsibility to ensure through joint efforts durable stability of the region, a precondition for it to be economically and in every other way prosperous for all living in it.

The responsibility lies with all the parties: Serbia, a partner to NATO, its neighbours who are already Members of the Alliance or its aspirant Members, the most powerful NATO countries and the Alliance as a whole, which is present in the WB region and has a number of obligations established by the United Nations in safeguarding peace, security and stability. This certainly concerns Kosovo and Metohija and the discharge of the mandate under UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999). As a responsible and predictable partner, Serbia carries out its obligations, acts in line with the agreements reached and, as exporter of regional security, it has made and will continue to make its full contribution to the common goal. Therefore, we rightfully expect that the other

actors do the same and in the same measure.

Relations between Serbia and NATO are based on clear premises – a partner cooperation on the basis of the policy of military neutrality with no ambitions on the part of Serbia to become a Member of the Alliance and with a simultaneous openness to promote dialogue and practical cooperation with NATO within the existing framework. Exactly this kind of cooperation has advanced in recent years, thanks primarily to the continuing and frequent meetings of President Vucic with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, through regular annual visits and contacts at international events. I recall that Secretary General Stoltenberg attended in early October the opening of the exercise "Serbia 2018", the largest ever organized NATO exercise in the field of emergencies, with around 2,000 participants (of whom almost one half came from foreign countries) from 40 countries and participated, together with President Vucic, in the work of the Belgrade Security Forum.

I remind you that Serbia in October hosted a command and staff exercise called "Regex 2018", supported by computer simulation, which was attended by representatives of the armed forces of NATO Members and Partners participating in partnership programmes, and in view of the fact that we chair the South East Europe Security Steering Group (SEEGROUP) this year, we also hosted in October representatives from NATO Members and Partners in the region of the Western Balkans, including Western European NATO Partners. All this confirms once again the level of intensity of our cooperation and commitment to common goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Serbia is committed to the further development of its cooperation with the Alliance, both Members and Partners at the bilateral level, which represents two sides of the same coin. We have been successful in so doing since we joined the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) in 2006, in the framework of which we have been implementing projects in the field of reform and modernization our armed forces, capacity building and achievement of interoperability that we consider extremely important in capacity building for contribution to peacekeeping missions and peacekeeping operations. Following the success with the first cycle of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) adopted in 2015, the most advanced form of PfP cooperation for a country having no ambition to become a Member of the Alliance, drafting for the next bi-annual IPAP cycle is currently underway.

In the context of all these PfP cooperation actions, the policy of military neutrality of Serbia has never for a moment been at stake – it remains our clear, fundamental and distinct position respected by the Alliance, both by its Members and Partner countries, as well as fully respected by other countries. Also, we too respect the commitment of our neighbours and other countries to membership of the Alliance or of other military alliances. In this respect, we expect an understanding for our cooperation with non-NATO countries, based on the same principles of multifaceted cooperation alongside the pursuance of the policy of military neutrality. Our actions, forming an integral part of our PfP cooperation, including military and civilian exercises with the countries outside of NATO are not to the detriment of our relationship with NATO and its Members and vice versa.

The number of exercises is determined by our direct interest for cooperation on a certain issue

and is aimed at improving the capabilities of the armed forces in individual areas. The number of military exercises carried out with NATO, or with its Members, is higher than the number of exercises with other countries, which is only natural considering that we are surrounded by Members or aspirants for membership of the Alliance, that we are of necessity turned to each other, and that we have a particular interest in these exercises because of our contribution to international missions and operations (to which NATO Members and Partner countries are major contributors) and because of the need to achieve interoperability.

I trust and believe that NATO shares our position about the common interest to maintain peace and stability in the region. We expect the Alliance to understand and support our priorities, especially with regard to Kosovo and Metohija, since the situation in this province poses a major security challenge to Serbia. We consider that only a compromise solution can ensure a lasting peace and stability. There is not a single reason for something deemed acceptable for both parties to be refused by any third party. We are convinced that any agreement on the settlement of outstanding problems is beneficial to the maintenance of peace and stability in the region.

KFOR, as the sole legal and legitimate military presence in the Province, is essential in guaranteeing the implementation of the Brussels Agreement and practically the only guarantee of security and survival for the Serbs, their property and religious and cultural heritage sites in Kosovo and Metohija. For this reason, it is extremely important to us to have the mandate given to KFOR performed in accordance with UNSC resolution 1244 (1999) and with the Military Technical Agreement, that KFOR remains deployed in Kosovo and Metohija without being downsized and that it acts in a status neutral manner. We appreciate very much the KFOR commitment to the troop level and size being determined depending on the situation on the ground, rather than on the basis of pre-determined timeframes.

Serbia strongly opposes the transformation of the so-called Kosovo Security Force into the so-called Kosovo army, as it will be in violation of SCR 1244 and will threaten regional stability and the stability beyond the region. Most recent developments indicate that the Pristina authorities have obviously not given up on the formation of their armed forces, regardless of the fact that they have not formally defined them as such and have again taken already seen actions which are, I repeat, the chief cause of not only a standstill in the dialogue but a potential for instability and for even worse tensions and conflicts. In this context, it would be greatly appreciated if NATO formulated a strong position regarding earlier announcement by Pristina of unilaterally giving effect to such transformation, expecting NATO to be clearly and uncompromisingly opposed to it this time in its communication not only with Pristina but also with the public at large. Only such a message can be effective in putting an end to provocations and utterly dangerous moves on the part of Pristina.

Of great importance to us are guarantees that the so-called Kosovo Security Force and other armed units, made up of Kosovo Albanians, are not allowed to come to the north of the Province without the consent of KFOR Commander and leaders of Kosovo Serbs in the north. Unfortunately, we are often witness to such units coming to the northern, predominantly Serb-populated areas, a move always carrying with it a potential escalation spiralling out of control. That is why we expect that NATO/KFOR act preventively to stop such actions in Northern Kosovo and Metohija, as they have a mandate to do so. In situations like these, we expect international factors to condemn in unambiguous terms disregard for the agreements

reached and to clearly say which party violates the agreements, instead of calling on all parties to exercise restraint, because that is the way to encourage those who have already violated the agreements.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to re-emphasize on this occasion as well the importance of the fact that it is impossible to live in the past, and that for the sake of general prosperity it is necessary to combine our efforts to ensure that our common future is brighter and more prosperous.

Clearly, the relations between Serbia and NATO continue to bear the heavy burden of the past and that the initial association that comes to mind to our population at the mention of NATO still is the NATO bombing campaign in 1999. Many Serbs have lost their loved ones in it and, consequently, it is very important that Mr Stoltenberg repeatedly offered his condolences over the civilian losses in the bombing and his sympathies to the families of the victims. Before him, none of the NATO Secretaries General have done so.

The answer to the question what NATO can do to improve the image of the Alliance in the public opinion of Serbia, is simple. A significant contribution in that respect would be any NATO move reflected in one of these: support for the foreign policy objectives of Serbia; a clear warning that any unilateral steps will be inadmissible; opposition to KSF transformation; assistance in preserving our cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija; reconstruction of the infrastructure destroyed in the NATO bombing or construction of the new infrastructure, etc.

I emphasize, and it is important that our people know it, that the task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of other institutions is to explain to the public in Serbia the essence of the cooperation between Serbia and the Alliance, its benefits for the citizens of Serbia and how it contributes to a better foreign policy position of Serbia. That is precisely the reason for my presence here today, together with my colleagues from the MFA who will participate in panel discussions with representatives from the other institutions and guests from abroad. In this way, we wish to show that the policy of the state is transparent and understandable, that we are not hiding any information and that the public has full access to all information.

Finally, it remains for me to wish you all successful and fruitful discussions at this event.

Thank you."