



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the ceremony of awarding diplomas to students of the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy, class 2017/18, and a new generation enrolment:

"Dear students of the Diplomatic Academy,

Dear professors and colleagues,

Today's diploma awarding ceremony to the students of the Diplomatic Academy is a solemn occasion unto itself, but also an opportunity to touch upon two important topics that are at the very core of our duties here.

The first is, naturally, related to international situation and challenges facing the foreign policy of our country. And the second one concerns you as members of diplomatic staff to pursue this foreign policy through your engagement throughout the state administration.

This is also an opportunity to recall that the key foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia are the principled fight for the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, further course of the accession talks with the European Union until ultimately becoming a Member State, further development of good-neighbourly relations, promotion of relations and a stronger connectivity with countries with major influence, and also our military neutrality.

As you know, reaching a political solution for Kosovo and Metohija remains the national priority of our country. Serbia has demonstrated this through its dedication to the dialogue with Pristina and by following up on its commitments, in line with the principles and values we pursue and stand for as a state. However, the moves made by Pristina have been undermining the dialogue and regional stability and, most importantly, threatening the safety of Serbs and other non-Albanian population in Kosovo and Metohija. Even five and a half years after the conclusion of the Brussels Agreement, Pristina has yet to embark on the implementation of its commitments, first and foremost the establishment of the Community of Serbian Municipalities. In such circumstances, our endeavours continue aiming to resolve issues related to property, cultural and religious heritage, cadastral records, freedom of movement, while opposing in particular the establishment of the so-called army of "Kosovo", which could jeopardize not only the security in the Province and the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, but also the stability of the entire region.

By exercising an active approach and through the devoted work and efforts of our diplomacy towards the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, we have achieved success reflected in seven states revoking their previous recognitions of the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo. Lesotho was the last among them, including Suriname, Sao Tome and Principe, Burundi, Papua New Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

As for our other foreign policy priorities, Serbia sees membership of the European Union as its

key strategic goal. The EU accession process is defined through a reform package for Serbia to implement in order to harmonize its legislative framework and administrative apparatus with Europe. The reform package focuses on the judiciary and fight against corruption and human trafficking.

One of the important segments of our foreign policy is the maintenance and promotion of the close and friendly relations with the Russian Federation. Building on the tradition of good relations we have developed a strategic partnership, while maintaining constant communication at the highest level. In addition to the full support offered by Russia to Serbian territorial integrity, this country is at the same time one of our leading partners in terms of foreign trade. This year marks the 180th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Serbia and the Russian Federation, and one of the events organized on this occasion was the visit by Minister Lavrov to Belgrade. President Vucic, too, recently visited Moscow and it is expected that President Putin will visit Serbia again in January 2019.

The relations with China have been significantly promoted in the recent years, which resulted in establishing a strategic partnership, as well as a visit by the Chinese President to Serbia in 2016. The Republic of Serbia is fully supportive of "The Belt and Road" initiative launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping and is among the most diligent in the framework of the China-CEEC (16+1) cooperation format. In terms of the economy, Chinese companies have been at the forefront of investments in infrastructure in Serbia, resulting in an improved connectivity of the country and the region and, thus, a better environment for foreign investments. In this context, Serbia is currently a country participating in the largest number of joint projects in Central and Eastern Europe.

Although we do not share their views concerning the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo and Metohija, what we do share with the U.S. is the common goal of stability and prosperity for the Western Balkans. In this regard, Serbia has been a reliable and responsible partner. In recent years, political dialogue has been intensified at high and top levels, economic relations have developed as well as military cooperation. I am pleased to be able to say that a considerable progress has been made in the relations with the United States of America – President Vucic was on a bilateral visit to Washington, D.C., while an invitation to President Trump was extended too for a visit to Serbia.

What used to be the "Third Way" of Yugoslavia and its leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement has today become a foreign policy asset of Serbia in its fight for the preservation of territorial integrity, but also towards the development of economic cooperation with countries belonging to this bloc. A majority of African, Latin American and Asian countries share the same positions concerning the respect for international law. In this context, Serbia pays great attention to the development of all-round cooperation with these traditional friends, and particularly to rebuilding the economic cooperation and attracting investments.

Throughout all of its activity Serbia has built for itself a profile of a responsible, reliable and predictable partner with no hidden agendas. However, anyone aiming to fully perceive the complexity of the calling of a diplomat, and particularly in the foreign policy circumstances our country is dealing with, he or she needs to bear in mind that what was mentioned here is but a fraction of bilateral activities.

As for Serbia's diplomatic efforts at the multilateral level, I have to point to the topicality of the fight to prevent Pristina's all too well known aspirations to join UNESCO, Interpol and other international organizations. In addition, we are carrying out regular activities in the fields of human rights, humanitarian issues, democracy and rule of law.

Distinguished students of the Diplomatic Academy,

An important aspect of our foreign policy orientation is also the policy of military neutrality, which in no way implies a policy of isolation but, in fact, the opposite. The biggest challenge for us is to pursue such a policy to identify avenues for good cooperation with all stakeholders. To illustrate this, I will mention that the number of joint military exercises with NATO members surpasses that carried out with the Russian Federation. However, this is not indicative of our foreign policy and military orientation, but simply reflects the fact that six out of eight Serbia's neighbouring countries are already NATO members and it is only natural that you cooperate the most with your neighbours, because you share a lot more in common with them than just state borders. In line with its foreign policy orientation to pursue membership of the EU, Serbia has been committed to cooperating with all EU Member States and institutions in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy. By participating in EU- and UN-mandated missions and operations Serbia has been demonstrating its commitment to making a tangible contribution to global, European and regional security, adherence to international law, while further affirming its European orientation. The Republic of Serbia takes part in four EU- as well as five UN-mandated missions and operations, in which 279 personnel of the Serbian Army are currently deployed. Our country is, therefore, among the top European countries according to its contribution to peace missions and the first in the Western Balkans region.

Process has been underway to establish a national legal and institutional framework to enable participation of civilian structures as well in such multinational missions. All these activities constitute an important segment of the Serbian foreign policy, not only as steps to bring the country closer to the EU, but also as a token of mutual trust and readiness to share responsibility.

Dear young colleagues,

I am confident that the complexity of the task before us in pursuit of the country's foreign policy will not discourage you in your future activities, but on the contrary, motivate you further to develop professionally and build personal capacities. A Serbian diplomat is expected to work facing an increasing discord between the society's prejudice against alleged prestige, privileges and lucrative benefits of the diplomatic profession on the one hand, and the pressure and responsibility entailed in a series of continuous and delicate diplomatic and consular circumstances and occurrences, on the other.

I am particularly pleased that this generation has yielded more students with high average marks, with as many as five of you having maximum scores in this regard. Considering that they took the majority of exams while also finishing their apprenticeship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I would like to congratulate Ms. Jelena Delic and Mr. Marko Protic for being the best students of the generation.

Mr. Vladimir Koturovic and Mr. Milos Purkovic from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ms. Marija Tanaskovic from the Security Information Agency have also finished the training with maximum average score.

I would like to underline in particular the success achieved by Mr. Nikola Radojlovic from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and his 9.89 average score and to thank him for leading by example in showing perseverance and dedication as well as for actively partaking in all activities at the Diplomatic Academy.

To all the students of this generation being awarded their diplomas today I want to thank for their cooperation in the past year, and I hope that the knowledge they acquired and friendships and contacts made at the Diplomatic Academy will make a huge impact on your professional

development and efficiency in the duties you perform in your respective ministries.

I would also like to extend my warm welcome to the students of the new generation and wish you to, first of all, manage to balance your professional duties with the tasks and requirements at the Diplomatic Academy. I also hope that you will manage to surpass the success of your predecessors and that such a trend will become a tradition.

In the months ahead, the Programme you are about to attend at the Diplomatic Academy will provide you with an opportunity to absorb many facts, but I also hope that this will offer you at least as much encouragement for independent thinking. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to thank those without whom the Programme would not exist – all of the previous and future lecturers, and particularly the coordinator for their great support in the evaluation of the attendants' knowledge and skills.

Thank you all once again for your attention and I wish you the best of luck and all the success."