



Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Today we observe the so-called Serbian New Year. As I welcome you to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia at our traditional New Year's reception, I would like to wish you a happy and prosperous New Year and, at the same time, to thank you for the good and fruitful cooperation throughout 2018. I am convinced that the good work is ahead of us this year again with a lot of joint efforts to promote further our relations and improve cooperation.

We are pleased with the foreign policy track record of the Republic of Serbia last year, in the face of many challenges and complex circumstances prevailing at the international scene. As an open and well-intentioned member of the international community, the Republic of Serbia sought to preserve and affirm its national interests, while respecting its international obligations and principles, never to the detriment of relations with other partners. In the future too we shall continue to build relations and partnerships based on dialogue, mutual respect and compliance with our obligations and, like all countries of the world, we shall do so with all others without exception, whether or not our positions on specific issues converge or diverge, always taking into account the protection and promotion of our national interests.

The past year was marked by an extremely vibrant diplomatic activity of the Republic of Serbia both at bilateral and multilateral levels, with a large number of meetings at the highest level. The plans made so far suggest that 2019 will be as dynamic or even more so. It gives me particular pleasure to note that last year I paid official visits to states on almost all continents. As for Africa, I visited Morocco, Angola, Mozambique, Burundi, Lesotho and the Union of the Comoros. As for Europe, I visited Austria, FR Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Montenegro, Holy See and Cyprus. By visiting Brazil, Mexico, Suriname, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada and the Dominican Republic we stepped up our dialogue with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. I visited the United States several times. In Asia, I visited India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In the last year, we played a good host to a number of high and highest-ranking foreign officials. Let me mention some of these: visits of the President of Israel, Prime Minister of Japan, Presidents of the Republic of Cyprus and Ukraine, Vice President of India, Ministers of Foreign

Affairs of the Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Austria, Denmark, France, Greece, Canada, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Ukraine, Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, Morocco, Algeria, Union of the Comoros, Suriname, Lesotho, Cape Verde, Liberia, Ghana.

Of no less importance are many bilateral meetings I had with foreign officials on the sidelines of meetings of various international organizations.

In the year ahead, highest priority will still be given to the preservation of the interests of the Republic of Serbia in connection with Kosovo and Metohija whereby we shall not abandon our commitment to dialogue and compromise in order to arrive at a comprehensive, long-term and stable solution. In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia remains committed to the principles of international law and I would like to take this opportunity to express once again our gratitude to those countries that have not recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, for their principled position and support extended to Serbia all these years by respecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity. I would also like to thank those states which acknowledged our arguments and made a decision to revoke their recognition of UDI of "Kosovo". Let me remind you once again that so far 12 states backtracked on their recognition decisions and that is why I would like to thank again the Union of the Comoros, Liberia, Burundi, Lesotho, Madagascar, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands for withdrawing their recognitions in 2018, demonstrating that way that they are on the side of law and justice and thus giving a chance to dialogue pending a lasting and compromise solution.

Let me also thank once again all states that supported Serbia's position and voted against "Kosovo" membership in INTERPOL and point out that this time around more states voted against this bid than in the 2015 vote over "Kosovo" membership in UNESCO. Then, 92 states voted in favor and this time the number was no more than 76, indicating that "Kosovo" enjoys less support than others seek to portray. This is yet another indicator that the international circumstances have changed and that the unilateral actions by Pristina can no longer gain traction.

In response to some claims that our efforts aimed at getting certain countries to revoke their recognition of Kosovo's UDI is a threat to dialogue, let me remind you that as then Prime Minister I embarked upon the Brussels dialogue in 2012 and since then, 26 countries recognized "Kosovo". How come the dialogue was not in danger then? Can anyone think that Madagascar's decision to recognize "Kosovo" on 25 November 2017 did not threaten dialogue and that all of a sudden Madagascar's decision to revoke its recognition on 5 December 2018 posed a threat to the dialogue? How can anyone ask Serbia to put an end to its efforts aimed at revoking UDI when these countries themselves urge others to recognize "Kosovo"? Moreover, they held it against us that we sought to prevent "Kosovo" membership in INTERPOL while they were actively engaged in pushing for "Kosovo" membership, even sending notes to other countries to support "Kosovo" bid. Indeed we are in favor of an agreement with Pristina but each unilateral action on their part which has not been agreed upon will be met with fierce response in defense of our interests. Just as any of you would do.

We have insisted and will continue to insist that in the interest of stability and economic progress Pristina continues to participate in the work of regional organizations and initiatives only if it respects the agreed arrangements within the Brussels dialogue. We have seen that regional cooperation has been disrupted exactly due to failure of the authorities in Pristina to honor the achieved agreements – the issue of CEFTA is just one dangerous example proving that the international community, the EU in particular, should devote additional attention to the

region and respond appropriately to make sure that Pristina honors the agreements. Otherwise, all that has been achieved with hard work can easily be eroded. The Republic of Serbia's accession to the EU remains our key foreign policy priority. It is our goal to ensure further support of EU Member States and institutions to Serbia's negotiation process, not an easy task taking into account UK Brexit, the Union's internal and foreign policy challenges and shrinking interest in the EU enlargement. We are not pleased that only four chapters have been opened last year while the Republic of Serbia was ready to open more. The number of opened chapters does not reflect accurately the progress of initiated reform processes in our country and we are very keen that our domestic efforts be validated also through the negotiating process with the EU, which will hopefully be the case in 2019. In that respect, we expect that the MEP elections will not affect the pace of our negotiating process and that the reform processes in Serbia will be recognized by opening more chapters. I would like to take this opportunity to wish Romania a successful Presidency of the Council of the European Union, hoping that it will keep enlargement policy as one of its priorities. I would also like to express an expectation that the EU will continue to play a constructive role in facilitating the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, when conditions are ripe.

Among our foreign policy priorities, we devoted special attention last year to strengthening relations with our neighbors. We wish to build friendly relations with all of them and to seek common interests rather than insist on what brings us apart. On this occasion, I would single out the visit of President Aleksandar Vucic to Zagreb as the most important activity concerning Croatia, the visit that jumpstarted the work of joint commissions dealing with open questions between our two countries. Also, in the election year in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we maintained regular dialogue with representatives of both entities. I paid an official visit to Podgorica and had high-level meetings in Macedonia and Slovenia. The upward trend in relations with Turkey and Greece continued, including exchanges of visits at high and highest level. Meetings of a high-level cooperation council with these two countries and Cyprus were held, while with Slovenia and Hungary we organized joint Government sessions. Cooperation in trilateral and quadrilateral formats with regional countries continued as well. With Bulgaria and Romania we exchanged visits at high and highest levels.

Last year, we marked 180th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. In honor of this landmark event, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov visited our country. I have been especially honored to have been awarded a Medal of Friendship of the Russian Federation by my friend Foreign Minister Lavrov. Last year we met on seven occasions – in addition to his visit to Serbia and three visits that I paid to the Russian Federation, the two of us also met in Banja Luka, Milan and New York. President Aleksandar Vucic visited Moscow twice. He is one of the rare foreign dignitaries that had the honor to attend the military parade on the occasion of Victory Day on 9 May. We perceive the forthcoming visit of President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to the Republic of Serbia as an opportunity to further strengthen our cooperation and as a powerful endorsement of friendly relations between our two countries. A proof of that is the Order of Alexander Nevsky that will be awarded to President Vucic by President Putin.

Bilateral cooperation with China went a step further when President Vucic met Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang at the World Economic Forum Summit. Intensive cooperation has been continued also within China's initiative with 16 Central and Eastern European Countries, through signature of three major inter-state agreements with the Chinese side. Recent opening of the Cultural Center of the Republic of Serbia in Beijing should

be singled out as an important segment of our cooperation.

We also observed an important anniversary with the United States – 100 years since the Serbian flag flew over the White House in honor of Serbian sacrifices in the First World War. This outstanding and important historic date for our two countries, marked by a reception in Washington D.C. and symbolic hoisting of the Serbian flag in the residence of U.S. Ambassador in Belgrade, coincided with a more constructive dialogue and better understanding on the part of our U.S. partners concerning issues of importance to the Republic of Serbia. In 2018, I met with then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and later on with National Security Adviser John Bolton. I recently met also with the current Secretary Mike Pompeo. We wish to build as good relationship as possible with the United States in line with our historic alliance forged in both World Wars.

Last year, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Le Drian visited Serbia. Unfortunately, President Macron's visit had to be cancelled but we hope that it will take place soon.

Serbia's international position was additionally strengthened with its associated member status in the International Organization of la Francophonie, in the Community of Portuguese Language Countries and in the Pacific Alliance.

I emphasize with great pleasure that in 2018, the activities related to the implementation of project "The World in Serbia", launched at the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the academic year 2017-2018 will be continued by new projects in academic 2018-2019.

In the context of its security policy, Serbia continues to be guided by the policy of military neutrality and its contribution to shared responsibility in facing security challenges. Serbia's commitment to the EU Common Security and Defense Policy has been reaffirmed by our readiness, in line with our capabilities, to contribute to European policies in this field, by our continued participation in UN- and EU-mandated missions and operations. Serbia currently takes part in four EU and 6 UN missions and operations with a total of 290 personnel of the Serbian Armed Forces. In terms of demographics, Serbia is third European troop contributor. To Serbia, the relations with NATO in the framework of the Partnership for Peace Program are an important segment of its foreign and security policy. The partner cooperation with NATO interferes in no way whatsoever with the policy of military neutrality pursued by Serbia, and I am glad to be able to say that our NATO partners understand and respect such a position. KFOR - the NATO security presence in Kosovo has been of utmost importance for the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija. Regretfully, the security situation in the Province calls for undiminished KFOR presence, and we are glad that many NATO member countries have also acknowledged this problem. Furthermore, Serbia highly appreciates NATO guarantees that the security forces of the Kosovo Albanians armed with long-barrel guns, however they are or may be called, cannot enter northern Kosovo and Metohija without prior authorization of KFOR and of the representatives of the local Serbian communities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a contribution of our country's heritage to world peace and anti-fascism, in January last year I had the honor to open an exhibition entitled "Jasenovac – The Right to Unforgetting", at UN Headquarters in New York, mounted to observe the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. It was the first exhibition in the history of the United Nations devoted to the plight of the Serbs in that notorious concentration camp and one of the major exhibitions in the UN on the Holocaust and genocide ever. It was a modest contribution to the preservation of universal values of mankind and global UN efforts aimed at preventing revisionism and revamping neo-Nazi and

neo-fascist ideologies and opposing all forms of discrimination and fanaticism.

In 2018, we paid much attention to boosting our consular network. We opened a Consular Office of the Consulate General of the Republic of Serbia in Banja Luka, with a seat in Trebinje, and the Consular Office of the Consulate General of the Republic of Serbia in Mostar, with a seat in Drvar. We also expanded the network of Honorary Consuls of the Republic of Serbia abroad, particularly in the countries where we have identified an interest to promote bilateral relations and ensure more efficient consular protection to our nationals and legal persons. Furthermore, agreements on visa liberalization were concluded with a number of countries in order to strengthen the economic, cultural and tourist ties, as required by EU norms and standards. According to the world's passport power index, Serbian passport was upgraded from 37th place in 2017 to 31st place in 2018. We plan to further develop consular relations, expand and modernize our consular network and upgrade the quality of consular services to our nationals abroad.

Dear friends,

So, at the beginning of this New Year, I would like to thank you once again for an excellent cooperation and urge you not only to maintain the current level but to take it even further. As for this Ministry, my colleagues and I will be pleased as always to maintain our regular and fruitful communication with you to the benefit of our overall relations. Let me wish you all good health and a lot of professional success in 2019.

Thank you and all the best!