

## **SERBIA**

### **MRKIC: PAST IS NOT IN FOCUS IN RELATIONS WITH CROATIA**

BELGRADE, Jan. 17 (Tanjug) - Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivan Mrkic has said that the politicians and people of Serbia and Croatia face a sensitive and difficult task of doing everything in their power to prevent the trial concerning the two countries' mutual charges of genocide before the International Court of Justice from casting a shadow on the work the two sides have done so far and undermine the future development of their relations. "During the process concerning Croatia's charges of genocide and Serbia's counterclaim, it is inevitable that painful issues from the past will be reopened and it would be naive to claim that it will not have any consequences to our mutual relations," Mrkic told the daily newspaper Danas.

Serbia has advocated a mutual withdrawal of the charges, but no agreement has been reached because of Croatia's not entirely understandable reluctance, he pointed out. An agreement for both sides to withdraw their charges is still possible, even though the day of the public hearing approaches, but Croatia still insists that Serbia should first provide information on missing people from the war in Croatia.

According to the non-governmental organization Veritas, the Serbian side is looking for 1906 Serbs who disappeared in Croatia during the 1991-1995 civil war, while Croatia is searching for 884 Croats. "Finding the truth about the missing on all sides of the wars in the former Yugoslavia is a civilizational and moral obligation and we are dedicated to that issue," Mrkic stated. Serbia's view regarding the lawsuits has been clear and presented to the Croatian side a number of times, and that is that Croatia filed charges first and it is up to it to make the first step towards withdrawing them, he noted. "We did not want this dispute. We felt that we should look towards the future, be politically wise and brave and continue working towards improving the overall relations between our countries and peoples, which remains our lasting goal," Mrkic stressed. "If it is also necessary to go through a trial before the International Court of Justice, we are well prepared for that. Our legal team has prepared solid and good arguments and we are ready for the start of the public hearing," he said.

Relations with neighbours are among every country's top priorities, he remarked, adding that he was particularly concerned over the recent events in Croatia where some groups had been openly spreading hate towards the Serbs, their language and culture. "In connection with that, we are in intensive dialogue and have been met with understanding from the Croatian government, but unfortunately, we see that those assurances and efforts, which I believe are sincere, are not always accompanied by adequate results and do not lead to improvements in life conditions and safety of the Serbs in Croatia, Mrkic stated.

### **THREE NEW SERBIAN EMBASSIES TO OPEN IN 2014**

BELGRADE, Jan. 17 (Tanjug) - Serbia is planning to open three new embassies this year, in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Ghana, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on Friday. "Serbia has never had diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and the opening of an embassy in Riyadh will develop the two countries' political and economic relations, intensify dialogue and build mutual trust," the ministry said. There is a plan to also open five diplomatic offices, in Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Vietnam and Cambodia. The goal of the ministry is to have a developed diplomatic network in as many countries as possible, all in order to improve Serbia's diplomatic

representation and support the growth of the economy.

Foreign Minister Ivan Mrkic has said that the possibility of opening joint embassies with countries of the region is also being considered. "We are the closest to an agreement with Macedonia and Montenegro. We are continuing the plan to expand the diplomatic and consular network and will offer everyone interested a chance to join us. It would reduce costs, but also provide the countries of the with better representation and more visibility in many parts of the world, as well as easier joint operation," Mrkic noted.

### **NIKOLA LUKIC APPOINTED AS SERBIA'S NEW AMBASSADOR TO TUNISIA**

BELGRADE, Jan. 20 (Tanjug) - Nikola Lukic has been appointed as Serbia's new ambassador to Tunisia, according to the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia. The decree on Lukic's appointment was signed by Serbia's President Tomislav Nikolic on January 15. Lukic will replace the former ambassador Milica Cubrilo Filipovic.

### **VULIN LAYS WREATH AT ARIEL SHARON'S GRAVE**

BELGRADE, Jan. 18 (Tanjug) - Serbia's Minister without Portfolio in charge of Kosovo Aleksandar Vulin has laid a wreath at the grave of Ariel Sharon and paid his respects to the recently deceased former prime minister of Israel, the Serbian government office for Kosovo stated on Saturday. The Serbian people will remember Sharon for opposing the 1999 NATO bombing campaign against the former Yugoslavia and advocating respect for sovereignty of other nations and a policy of not interfering with their internal affairs, the statement says. Vulin is on an official visit to Israel from January 17 to 19 and will deliver a lecture at the Truman Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the most important Israeli institute, where foreign policy and security agenda of the country are defined.

### **SERBIA - EU**

#### **DACIC: JANUARY 21 IS HISTORIC DAY FOR SERBIA**

BELGRADE, Jan. 20 (Tanjug) - Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic said ahead of the first intergovernmental conference with the EU in Brussels, scheduled for Tuesday, that he is proud to be one of the rare prime ministers of Serbia to produce a historic result that future generations will remember. "Tomorrow is a historic day for Serbia because for the first time we can say that something will happen, instead of just announcing something," said Dacic in a program aired on TV B92.

The PM noted that besides him, the delegation of Serbia will also include First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, ministers Ivan Mrkic and Branko Ruzic, and lead negotiator Tanja Miscevic, while the EU will be represented by Greek Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos and European Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule. "The government of Serbia has adopted the introductory statement to be presented tomorrow, and this document contains Serbia's stand on the EU negotiation framework and our views on the negotiation course and positions. It refers to building the concept of a society towards which Serbia should strive, and the EU is not only the goal, but also the means by which we will modernize our system," Dacic concluded.

## **VUCIC: GOAL TO COMPLETE EU ACCESSION-RELATED WORK BY 2018**

BELGRADE, Jan. 20 (Tanjug) - Serbia's goal is to complete all EU-accession-related work by 2018, Serbia's First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said on Monday, adding that he expects the country to become a full-fledged EU member in 2020. "Our goal is to finish everything that is up to us by 2018, after which the decision on our accession to the EU in 2020 will no longer depend on us," Vucic told reporters in the Serbian government building.

Tuesday, January 21 - the date of the first Serbia-EU intergovernmental conference in Brussels - is an important, big day for Serbia, Vucic said, adding that an agreement must be reached at Monday's government session on some issues related to Serbia's negotiating framework to ensure a unanimous government approach to the talks with the partners in Brussels. The issues are particularly related to Chapter 35, which deals with Kosovo, with a referendum on EU accession - which could be held in 2019 - also among the matters to be ironed out.

## **DAVENPORT: CITIZENS WILL FEEL CHANGES EVEN DURING TALKS**

BELGRADE, Jan. 20 (Tanjug) - The first intergovernmental conference between Serbia and the EU in Brussels on Tuesday is a great opportunity for Serbia to present its plans on how to respond to the challenges ahead, Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Michael Davenport has said. The conference will mark the start of the accession talks with the EU and the people of Serbia will feel improvements even during the talks, he told Radio and Television of Serbia. Chapters 23 and 24 are undoubtedly the most important areas in the talks with the EU because they are the hardest based on previous experience, he noted. As for the reforms of the judiciary and government administration and battle against corruption, the EU will continue to review these areas over the next year, he added. The EU wants to see real progress, even during the talks, when it comes to the judiciary reform, Davenport stated, pointing out court inefficiency as a particular problem. He stressed the importance of law implementation, explaining that reforms would not be possible without that. It is up to the EU and the Serbian government to decide how the country's legislation will be harmonized with that of the EU, he said. As for monitoring the implementation of laws, Serbia has its own institutions for that, like the parliament, courts and ombudsman, Davenport stated.

## **EIB: EUR 150 MILLION FOR SERBIA**

BRUSSELS, Jan. 20 (Tanjug) - The European Investment Bank (EIB) has approved a loan of EUR 150 million for infrastructure projects and small and medium companies in Serbia, the EIB has stated. This is the first part of a EUR 500 million intended for Serbia's economic recovery and assistance in EU integration, the EIB said. The largest part of the funds are meant for small and medium companies, while the rest will be used for small and medium local infrastructure projects, mostly concerning environment protection and rationalizing power consumption.

## **ECONOMY**

### **TABAKOVIC EXPECTS NOTHING BAD FROM SERBIA'S LOWER RATING**

BELGRADE, Jan. 19 (Tanjug) - National Bank of Serbia Governor Jorgovanka Tabakovic said

on Saturday she expected no negative consequences to Serbia's economy from the drop in the country's credit rating. "It indicates that the good decisions made by the government concerning fiscal consolidation have not yielded results yet," she told Tanjug. "We live in a time when the credit ratings of far stronger economies are dropping, so I am convinced this will not lead to negative trends on our financial market and will not affect those markets that had already decided to invest in Serbia," she noted.

Tabakovic believes Serbia will sign a precautionary arrangement with the IMF, which should help cancel out the drop in credit rating and dispel any fears among the investors regarding potential investments in Serbia. An arrangement with the IMF is not needed because of money, since the foreign exchange reserve is at its highest, EUR 11.2 billion, but because it would be an additional recognition of the credibility of Serbia's economic policy, she pointed out. The arrangement would mean that Serbia is now implementing the reforms it decided on and that the economy is on a certain path to recovery and sustainable development, she said. "It will have a positive influence on the way Serbia is perceived by foreign investors, who we need now and in the future," she underscored.

### **CHINESE OPEN EUROPEAN OFFICE IN SERBIA**

UB, Jan. 19 (Tanjug) - The Chinese electrical power corporation Sinomach-CNEEC-CNEETC has opened its European office in Ub, northwestern Serbia. Ub is in the Kolubara region and China is interested in large energy projects in Serbia, the power plant Kolubara B, coal mine Radljevo, power plant Djerdap 3 and small hydroelectric power plants. The corporation is willing to invest EUR 1.3 billion in Kolubara B and Radljevo alone, regional director of the company Ni Weihong said. The negotiations concerning Kolubara B are still ongoing and the project could begin soon if the successful cooperation between Serbia and China continues, he pointed out. The new strip mine, Radljevo, should provide coal for the power stations Kolubara B and Nikola Tesla B3 in Obrenovac, near Belgrade, which have yet to be constructed.

The Chinese corporation picked Serbia for its first European office because China and Serbia have a good legal basis for cooperation, Ni stated, adding that besides large projects, the corporation would also be involved in medium and small investments in various areas, like transport infrastructure, energy, agriculture and textile industries. The office in Serbia will work on projects throughout the region, from Ukraine to the Adriatic Sea, and already an agreement has been reached to build a power station in Romania, a project worth around EUR 1 billion, he remarked. There are also plans for projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia.

Four contracts were signed at the opening of the office in Ub, with the company Kolos from Obrenovac on producing coal briquettes, railway crossings and chemical products, and with DDR on projects in agriculture and textile industries. Two contracts with Prva iskra from Baric were also signed, to build a shipping container port and a solar plant in Baric, which should employ several hundred people.

### **ALABBAR PRESENTS BELGRADE ON WATER PROJECT TO VUCIC**

BELGRADE, Jan. 18 (Tanjug) - Serbia's Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic attended on Saturday a presentation of the project Belgrade on Water, held by Mohamed Alabbar, owner of recently founded company Eagle Hills. Parliament Speaker Nebojsa Stefanovic, head of Belgrade provisional council Sinisa Mali and other officials were also at the event. Alabbar also

owns Emaar Properties, which build Burj Al Arab, the tallest building in the world. He is willing to invest over USD 3 billion in the Belgrade project. The project includes apartments, hotels, piers and an opera, said Vucic on Friday. Eagle Hills is based in the United Arab Emirates and focuses on large realty project abroad.

Head of the recently established company Eagle Hills Mohamed Alabbar has said that the initial investment in the project Belgrade on the Water will be EUR 2.5-2.8 billion. He told reporters 90 percent of the work had been completed, and that what remained were details like the locations for parks, infirmaries, shopping centres and other facilities. It is a large project at an interesting location and will result in a modern city that will push Serbia's economy forward, because it will provide a stimulus to all of its sectors, particularly construction, hospitality and tourism. The project is without a doubt one of the most important for Eagle Hills, and the company's officials will work with the local authorities in the coming months to ensure the project is completed as soon as possible, he noted. It is a very demanding project, whose realization has to involve environment protection, he explained. The support from the national and local governments is unbelievable, he stated, adding that the project was an opportunity for everyone.

Head of the Belgrade provisional council Sinisa Mali said 80 percent of the project design had been harmonized. "We should create a company named Belgrade on the Water as soon as possible, start expropriating the land not owned by the government and prepare planning documentation so the first stage of the project could be start by late 2014," Mali stated.