

SERBIA

DACIC MEETS WITH ISRAELI AMBASSADOR

BELGRADE, 11 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic on Jan. 11 discussed bilateral ties with Israeli Ambassador to Serbia Alona Fisher-Kamm, the Foreign Ministry of Serbia said in a press release. The officials agreed that Serbia-Israel relations were good and constantly improving. The two nations are committed to further developing ties to mutual benefit and there are no obstacles on this road, the statement read. Dacic advocated defining steps and measures with a view to enhancing relations in all areas.

VUCIC: SERBIA WILL ALWAYS BE A STRONG PILLAR OF SUPPORT TO REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

BELGRADE, 11 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that Serbia, always a true friend and a reliable partner, would also be "a strong pillar of support for Republika Srpska," the Office of the Serbian President quoted the president as saying in a press release. President Vucic met in Belgrade, on Jan. 11, with Republika Srpska's Prime Minister Radovan Viskovic, saying at the meeting that economic prosperity and joint plans required peace and stability in the Bosnian Serb entity and Bosnia and Herzegovina. "With due respect to the Dayton accords, Serbia will always support different infrastructure projects and other ventures in Republika Srpska, as well as joint actions to foster shared cultural and spiritual ties," Vucic said. President Vucic and Prime Minister Viskovic discussed specific infrastructure and energy projects being run jointly by Serbia and Republika Srpska. The prime minister said he was looking forward to cooperating with President Vucic and the Serbian government and that he was expecting a new joint session to take place soon.

VUCIC SENDS A LETTER OF CONDOLENCE TO CHINESE PRESIDENT AFTER MINE ACCIDENT

BELGRADE, 12 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic wrote to his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, to express his condolences over a mine accident that killed 21 miners, President Vucic's press office reported on Jan. 12. "We are deeply moved by the tragic fate of the miners killed after a roof collapsed in a coalmine in the country's northern Shaanxi province. Allow me to share my deepest sympathy with you and the families of the killed miners," Vucic wrote, adding that Serbia was expressing its "friendly support to China." The Xinhua official news agency reported on Jan. 13 that 21 miners were killed in the mine accident, explaining that 60 had been evacuated safely. Accidents are quite frequent in Chinese mines, despite efforts by the authorities to improve working conditions and close illegal mines.

VUCIC: STATE WILL PULVERIZE CRIMINALS, STATE INTRODUCING LIFE SENTENCES

BELGRADE, 12 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic on Jan. 12 pledged that the state would "pulverize" criminals in a war that will not be ad hoc, but take years. "We are going to pulverize all of them. Who knows what will exactly happen, but I promise citizens that the state will pulverize criminals," Vucic said after a session of the National Security

Council. He announced that Serbia would introduce life sentences for multiple murders, child murder and other major crimes, especially if violence is involved. The minimum and maximum punishments will be extended. Vucic announced "a drastic, draconian increase in minimum and maximum sentences for all crimes with violent behavior, from domestic violence to murder," adding that proposals by the father of Tijana Juric, a little girl who was murdered, for increasing sentences for child murder had been accepted. He said the state's war on crime would be "real and convincing," and that everything in Serbia in this regard would change in one month. "We have a very lenient punitive policy. Sentences were in the largest percentage minimal, or reduced," Vucic said. He cited data that, while the law provided for sentences for rape from three to 12 years, in 36 percent of cases the sentence received was three years, and under five years in 33 percent of case, which in total is under 70 percent. "So why did we provide for sentences of up to 12 years? Either there were always extenuating circumstances here or there is something else leading to minimization of sentences," he said. He also said that some carrying of weapons had been decriminalized as the sentence in 55 percent of cases was probation, which he described as "a bad message sent to citizens by the state." Vucic also said that in 62 percent of cases of grand theft the sentences had ranged from six to 12 months, asking "How does that not pay off for robbers?" "I am not even going to talk about tax evasion, but I want to mention this, because this affects our children and undoes the fabric of our society -- the production and sale of drugs," Vucic said, adding that almost 80 percent of perpetrators had received sentences of under five years. He announced that sentences for rape would range from five to 15 years without the possibility of reduced sentences, and that no one could get under five years in prison. "We are going to go for raising sentences from 35 to 50 percent on everything," Vucic said. He said he expected EU support for introducing life sentences, because Germany had them, but not the Balkans. "We are going to increase sentences so that they do not dare kill each other here," Vucic announced, adding that he was not interested in the opinions of human rights activists.

KUBUROVIC: SERBIA IS IN NO WAY INVOLVED IN WORK OF SPECIAL COURT FOR KLA CRIMES

BELGRADE, 11 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian Justice Minister Nela Kuburovic said on Jan. 11 that Serbia was in no way involved in the work of the Special Court for the crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army, but would if needed. She told a joint news conference with Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic that Pristina had undertaken, in its Constitution and law, to cooperate with the EU to process former KLA members who committed crime. "We have been waiting to see sentenced persons for years," the minister said. She added that Serbia was ready to deliver the necessary evidence and to protect witnesses residing in Serbia should they chose to testify in these proceedings. On the topic of cooperation with Pristina in the investigation into the murder of SDP Civic Initiative leader Oliver Ivanovic, the minister said Pristina had filed eight requests to Belgrade during the inquiry and that each had been met. Stefanovic said plastic replicas of bullet casings used to kill Ivanovic had been delivered to Serbia, but that they were insufficient to pinpoint the murder weapon.

STEFANOVIC, KEEFE DISCUSS BILATERAL COOPERATION IN FIGHT AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

BELGRADE, 11 January 2019 (Beta) - The Serbian interior minister, Nebojsa Stefanovic, met in Belgrade, on Jan. 11 with the British ambassador to Serbia, Denis Keefe, to discuss bilateral cooperation in general, with an emphasis on fighting organized crime together. The Ministry of the Interior said in a release that the minister and the ambassador had discussed steps to be taken by the end of the year to boost bilateral ties. Migrations were also a theme, and Stefanovic and Keefe agreed that only joint solutions could produce good results in that area.

WBIF PROVIDES EUR44.4 INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT TO SERBIA

BELGRADE, 11 January 2019 (Beta) - The Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) approved a EUR44.4 million grant to Serbia, to support transportation projects, the Ministry of Construction, Transportation and Infrastructure announced on Jan. 11. Most of the funds, EUR40.6 million, will cover the cost of the first section of the Nis-Merdare-Pristina highway, from Nis to Plocnik. The total value of the 33km-long route between Nis and Plocnik is EUR212 million. Aside from the WBIF grant, the project will be financed with loans to be approved by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The WBIF has also allocated EUR3.8 million for technical documentation for waterway and railway transportation projects, including the reconstruction of the Belgrade-Zagreb rail line running through Serbia. Another EUR3 million have been set aside for feasibility studies, preliminary designs and strategic assessments of environmental impacts required for the Belgrade-Sid-national border, Stara Pazova-Golubinci-Sid and Indjija-Golubinci rail segments. A total of EUR800,000 will be spent on a feasibility study and preliminary design for the Port of Belgrade, located on the European Rhine-Danube corridor.