

SERBIA

DACIC, CHEPURIN DISCUSS PRESIDENT PUTIN'S VISIT TO SERBIA

BELGRADE, 15 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic and Russian Federation Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin discussed in Belgrade on Jan. 15 preparations for the upcoming visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Serbia on Jan. 17. Dacic said that for Serbia, its people and leadership it was a great pleasure and honor to host Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin on Jan. 17, who was a friend of Serbia and the Serb people and whose visit carried with it a very large symbolic importance, the ministry said in a statement. The Serbian foreign minister added that he was very happy that Putin's delegation would include his counterpart, Sergey Lavrov.

VUCIC: REMOVE TARIFFS, AND TALKS CAN GO ON

BELGRADE, 15 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Jan. 15 that Belgrade had attached no conditions to talks with Pristina, but that it was very important to put things back to where they had been before Pristina levied new taxes on imports from Serbia. "Nowhere else in the normal world are new taxes imposed to restrict the flow of goods. It's not something you do. Remove that obstacle, and we'll talk. Serbia is not forgetting an obligation from the Brussels dialogue you haven't fulfilled - the Community of Serb Municipalities. You are not even interested, while we have fulfilled all our obligations. And we still do, even though we are just a click away from going back to the previous situation," Vucic said. After a meeting with ambassadors and the head of the EU Delegation, Vucic said that the point was that someone should "bring Pristina's leaders to their senses," repeating that Serbia had always supported the talks. "What we are interested in is to continue the talks with legitimate and legal Albanian representatives. We should see if we can reach an agreement. As far as pressures go, the European Union has been very specific in their statements, but I think it's only America's view that concerns the Albanians. I apologize to the EU. And, thank Washington for being so openly against the tariffs," Vucic said.

FABRIZI ENCOURAGES SERBIA TO CONTINUE REFORMS

BELGRADE, 15 January 2019 (Beta) - Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Sam Fabrizi reiterated support to Serbia's EU accession on Jan. 15, urging the country to continue reforms in the process. At a press conference with President Vucic, following a joint meeting with EU ambassadors, Fabrizi said the rule of law was particularly important in Serbia's accession to the Union, saying that the country had made certain progress, but that it had to keep working on a judicial reform, anti-corruption measures and the freedom of the media. Fabrizi said the EU would resume its role of mediator in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, hoping that a sustainable, comprehensive agreement would be reached, appealing to Kosovo again to withdraw the tariff on imports from Serbia and Bosnia. Fabrizi said that EU accession was made to be a strategic goal for Serbia, which he said was "good for Serbia's citizens and economy." The EU has supported EU prospects for Serbia, as well as many other Western Balkan states. We used today's lunch to repeat those messages, the EU ambassador said. Fabrizi said that five key areas had been discussed - the independence of judiciary, struggle against corruption, the

freedom of the media, struggle against organized crime and regional issues. Commenting on Serbia's constitutional amendments, Fabrizi appealed for a reasonable debate in the parliament. As for the ongoing work on a new media strategy, he said that a "stimulating atmosphere" should be created for free media.

THOMAS SCHIEB: NO DEADLINES FOR BELGRADE, PRISTINA TO REACH AGREEMENT

BELGRADE, 15 January 2019 (Beta) - German Ambassador to Belgrade Thomas Schieb said there were no deadlines set for Belgrade and Pristina to reach an agreement to normalize their relations. "We hope the normalization talks between Belgrade and Pristina will continue as soon as possible, and that they will make progress," Schieb said in an interview published by the Vecernje Novosti newspaper on Jan. 15, commenting on an unofficial report that EU High Representative Federica Mogherini had requested that the dialogue be finalized by early June. When asked if Berlin might step up pressure on Pristina to withdraw a 100-percent import tax on Serbian products, Ambassador Schieb said he had been in close contact with the capital, and that their position was very clear, quoting the German foreign minister as openly criticizing the move, urging the authorities in Pristina to revoke the decision. The German diplomat said that Berlin wished Belgrade and Pristina to continue the EU-mediated dialogue, preferring that the format remain unchanged.

ECONOMY

VUCIC HOPES FOR POSITIVE EC DECISION ON QUOTAS FOR CHINA'S STEEL

BELGRADE, 15 January 2019 (Beta) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Jan. 15 that he hoped the European Commission would make a decision on quotas for Chinese steel imports on Jan. 16, which would be positive for Serbia as China's HBIS Group owned the local Zelezara Smederevo steel mill. "An unfavorable decision by the EC would be a disaster for the Serbian economy. I do hope the decision will be positive," Vucic said to reporters in Belgrade, after a meeting with EU ambassadors to Serbia. The president added that Zelezara's exports accounted for a mere 1.5 percent of total steel imports in the EU, but that it was very important for the Serbian economy. Vucic explained that a decision by the Chinese investor to leave Smederevo would deal a serious blow to Serbia and between 10,000 and 15,000 people who depended on Zelezara. "In order to create a stronger business setting, Serbia needs support from the EU, receiving 72 percent of Serbian exports," Vucic said, adding that Serbian growth depended on exports, not consumption. The president said there were people in Serbia who were "angry with the EU," but that the national economy would hardly move forward without the Union's support. Vucic explained that he had written to the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, to ask the two to use their influence to prevent the EC decision on steel import quotas from affecting Serbia's "fragile economy."

MIHAJLOVIC: SERBIA TO RECEIVE RAILROAD DISPATCHING CENTER BY 2021

BELGRADE, 15 January 2019 (Beta) - Minister of Construction, Transportation and Infrastructure of Serbia Zorana Mihajlovic said on Jan. 15 that Serbia was supposed to receive

the most modern dispatching center in railway transportation by 2021 and that it would cost EUR100 million. "We cannot go on talking about all these investments in railways on Corridor X and Corridor XI, if we do not have a spot from where we will manage railway traffic," Mihajlovic told reporters at the opening of a Russian RZD International photo exhibition in Kalemegdan Park. She said that the money, or EUR230 million for the dispatching center would be obtained from a contract between the Serbian and Russian railway companies, which was supposed to be signed during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Serbia on Jan. 17. Mihajlovic said that a portion of the money would be used for electrotechnical works on the Stara Pazova - Novi Sad railway and the project and technical documents for a part of the Bar railroad. "We did Resnik - Valjevo, while a segment between Valjevo and Vrbnica, that is Uzice, needs to be done, the project and technical documents first and foremost," she said. She added that the implementation of all projects that were covered by the contract needed to begin this year.