

Q: The Foreign Ministers of EU Member States concluded that the European Council, in the first half of 2013, should recommend that accession negotiations be opened with Serbia, if it pressed ahead with reforms and achieved a sufficient level of progress in its dialogue with Pristina. How do you see the fact that Serbia did not, actually, get the exact date for the start of negotiations? How frustrating is it for Serbia? Hasn't the EU in a way lived down the expectations of it, and what are the next steps to be taken by your country in this context?

A: We are happy with the conclusions of the Council of the European Union that were reaffirmed by the European Council as well. They open up the prospect for Serbia to be named in June 2013 a date for the commencement of its membership talks with the European Union. In particular, it is important that the conclusions verified the results of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue held at the level of Prime Ministers and the relevant representative of the provisional institutions of self-government in Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia will continue to make constructive efforts to that effect and to meet the EU membership requirements.

Q: You said that Serbia would give up EU membership should the membership be made dependent upon recognizing Kosovo as an independent state. Do you think that the most recent actions by the EU have been precisely along the lines of pressuring Serbia into recognizing Kosovo?

A: Serbia will never recognize Kosovo's unilaterally declared independence. On the contrary, the issue of Serbia's European integration process, as reaffirmed in the recently adopted conclusions, has not been raised at all, and the EU has actually retained its status neutrality in its key observations, given that five of the 27 EU Member States have not recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence.

Q: What steps may be envisaged by Serbia in the future with regard to the final settlement of the Kosovo issue? You indicated that "Serbia will not dismantle its institutions in Kosovo", but at the same time, that "you don't want the Kosovo Albanians to suffer but to live a normal life". Is Kosovo's partition still an option on the table, namely that Serbia eventually keeps control over northern Kosovo? Will you insist on it because of the demands of the Serbian community there?

A: Serbia is resisting the separatism of the ethnic Albanian minority in Kosovo and Metohija like any other country in the world. Some of them would even have recourse to the use of arms. However, we want a solution to be reached by peaceful means, a solution that needs to be balanced in order to be sustainable, genuine and durable.

Q: Will and how much the fact that the acquitted KLA commander Ramush Haradinaj will once again be at the helm of Kosovo's government, have an impact on the Kosovo issue?

A: This concerns the internal political relationships in the southern Serbian province and I would not like to make any wild guesses what would happen if...

Q: What is the relationship between Serbia and Russia? How will, in your view, the influence of Russia be spreading to the Balkan region in the future? Is Serbia closer to forging a military alliance with Russia and a few other former Soviet republics or, yet, with NATO?

A: Relations between Serbia and Russia are traditionally very good and friendly. They are based on historical, cultural, religious and linguistic close ties, characterized by compatibility of views on a wide range of issues of international importance. Meetings and visits at a high and highest level have been regular. President Nikolic has met with President Putin on two occasions already, and meetings between other high-ranking officials have also been frequently held. We are thankful for the support that Russia extends to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and its efforts to resolve the issue of Kosovo and Metohija peacefully and through diplomacy. Russia is also one of our major trading partners. In the January-October 2012 period, a trade balance of 1.73 billion US dollars was recorded with Russia. Cooperation has been developed in the sector of oil and gas industry, with Serbia being a participating country in the South Stream gas pipeline project. In December 2007, the Parliament of Serbia adopted the Declaration on Serbia's military neutrality, which rules out the possibility of its membership of any military alliance.

Q: How do you see relations between Serbia and Turkey? How pleased are you with this cooperation, and in which direction can it develop in the future? Are you satisfied with the economic cooperation?

A: We believe that our overall bilateral relations have been very good and developed. There is an intensive political dialogue at all levels between the two countries. We consider that there exist all the conditions for the development of all-round bilateral, primarily economic, cooperation between the two countries. Turkey shows its strong economic interest in the Balkan region, Serbia included. This is all the more so because Ankara sees Serbia as an important traffic route and the shortest possible link with Europe and the European market. Despite the signed and implemented agreements on free trade and mutual abolition of visas, the trade between Serbia and Turkey, amounting to almost 500,000 million US dollars, though doubled over the last two years, does not correspond to the current level of the political dialogue and potentials of the two countries. Therefore, we believe that conditions are now ripe for a more dynamic development of their economic cooperation, both in respect of an increase in trade and investment, in particular infrastructure development in Serbia. We are also of the opinion that there is significant scope for cooperation on joint ventures in third markets, notably the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Q: What is your position concerning the expansion of the Turkish influence in the Balkans and its efforts, by pursuing a peaceful policy and avoiding conflict, to be one of the factors of stability in this part of the world? This has been the subject of considerable discussion in the Balkans, and there have also been some negative comments in this regard.

A: Serbia has great respect for the growing role of Turkey in the international relations which is, among other things, also the result of Turkey's economic growth, since according to its size, Turkey is in sixteenth place on the world scale and sixth when compared with European economies. We believe that, in view of its historical ties with the Western Balkan region, Turkey can render a significant contribution to the strengthening of stability and creating a positive climate in regional relations, of course, through respect of the legitimate interests of the peoples and countries in this part of the globe. In that sense, Turkish policy, based on the principles of international law, the UN Charter and the CSCE/OSCE Final Act of Helsinki, can certainly

contribute to the improvement of the relations and overall mutual understanding in our region, as well as to overcoming misunderstandings and problems created in the recent past.

Q: What are your views of the increasingly vocal announcements of the creation of "Greater Albania"? To what extent could that be a problem for the Balkans? You visited the country recently; did you get the impression that this is in prospect?

A: We believe that promoting the idea of "Greater Albania" is contrary to all the present-day efforts made by the EU member and aspirant countries. Serbia's position on this issue is very clear – we are opposed to any forcible change of the internationally recognized borders, particularly in the Balkans which, due to its ethnic diversity, constitutes an extremely sensitive area where euphoric and nationalistically charged rhetoric is harmful in many ways. We consider that these and similar statements do not help build confidence and cooperation among the Western Balkan countries. We underline Serbia's enduring commitment to develop and promote its bilateral relations and cooperation with all its neighbouring countries and, in that context, sees Albania as an important partner with which it wishes to achieve stable good-neighbourly relations and promote cooperation in areas where that is possible and where there are common interests.

Q: Why did Serbia support Palestine in its efforts to be granted the status of an observer non-member state? What reactions did you receive in that connection? Particularly because it seems that Serbia's relations with Israel are rather good.

A: The Republic of Serbia, along with 132 UN Member States, including the majority of EU countries, decided to vote in favour of the Resolution granting Palestine the status of an Observer Non-Member State. This decision was passed in accordance with many resolutions previously adopted by the UN Security Council and General Assembly, reaffirming the right of Palestinians to self-determination. Serbia underlines the importance of prompt resumption of the peace talks and accelerated reaching of a peaceful solution, in accordance with the decisions of the UN Security Council, as well as the Madrid principles, in the interest of both Palestine and Israel. Israel is familiar with this position of the Republic of Serbia on this issue and the outcome of voting in this regard will not affect the traditionally good bilateral relations between the two very friendly countries.

Q: The rendering the judgment of acquittal in the "Gotovina and Markac" case caused serious problems in the relations between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia. Can the problems existing in the relations between the two countries give rise to problems in the entire Balkan region? After that judgment, it was heard from many sources that the relations in the Balkans had deteriorated. What are your comments on that?

A: The judgment certainly sends a bad message to the region, because it demonstrates that it is possible to commit the gravest crimes without getting away with it. Such a situation certainly renders difficult the overall process of reconciliation among the countries and peoples in the region. Nevertheless, for the sake of a better future of the citizens of both countries, we must do our very best to make the reconciliation process work.

Serbia and Croatia are and will continue to be neighbours, which makes it incumbent upon them to work on the promotion of their relations. For that purpose, during several meetings I had with my Croatian counterpart, Ms. V. Pusic, we managed to define the mechanisms for addressing the open issues and to agree on the areas where it is possible to intensify our cooperation. One of these areas is European integration and our teams are already working hard together in order to define a legal framework for regulating such cooperation.

Q: What are Serbia's expectations from the scheduled debate in the UN General Assembly regarding the Hague Tribunal? What kind of consequences can be expected?

A: The public hearing to be held in the UN General Assembly, on 10 April 2013, entitled "The role of international justice in the reconciliation process" enables the Republic of Serbia to inform the international public of its views regarding the work of international tribunals. It is expected that the debate will be followed by the adoption of conclusions in the form of an official document.

Q: Can this part of the world become a security issue again? We are witnessed to the eruption of outbreak of crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the relations between Serbia and Croatia, even in Macedonia recently. Is the Balkans facing new challenges even now on the occasion of the centenary of the Balkan Wars?

A: It is common knowledge that differences between us still exist, but I think that nowadays everyone understands that we have already wasted too much time and that no one has the right to jeopardize a better future of all our citizens. We in Serbia are of the opinion that it is in the general interest of our region to be developed, stable and secure, and that its diversity should be viewed as its wealth, rather than a source of misunderstandings and problems.

Q: How do you see the relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia? Are you planning to visit Sarajevo soon? What is the objective of Serbian foreign policy as regards Bosnia and Herzegovina?

A: The relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina are good and stable, but certainly there is room for their further improvement. To that end, I plan to visit Sarajevo at the end of this year and we expect a visit by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers V. Bevanda to Belgrade at the beginning of 2013. Serbia sees Bosnia and Herzegovina as a very close country with which it wants to have the best possible relations.

Q: Bosniak member of the Presidency B. Izetbegovic does not want to meet with the Serbian President T. Nikolic in the context of Nikolic's statements regarding a "slow demise of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and his denial of the genocide in Srebrenica. How do you comment it? To what extent can inflammatory rhetoric be a source of trouble in the Balkans?

A: President Nikolic's statements were misinterpreted and taken out of context. We believe that the best way to solve all possible misunderstandings is that legitimately elected representatives of the two countries have discussions at a high and highest level.

Q: Is it possible to have a new Belgrade-Zagreb-Sarajevo trilateral meeting in the near future?

A: Of course, it is something to be considered.

Q: President of the Republic of Srpska M. Dodik has published a document stating that it would be optimal if "Bosnia and Herzegovina were one whole, made up of three entities." Also, Dodik often wants to leave the impression that "Serbia is behind him" when political steps like these are concerned. What are your comments?

A: I do not want to comment on the statements of the officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina, no matter whether they are coming from Sarajevo or Banja Luka. Serbia's position regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina is clear-cut and principled. Serbia supports sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all the arrangements made under the Dayton Accords. We will support everything that the three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina agree upon.

Q: How would Serbia react if the Republic of Srpska proclaimed independence? Would you recognize the Republic of Srpska as an independent state?

A: I don't think anyone contemplates it either as a possibility or a matter to be discussed. It is certainly not something we are contemplating in Belgrade. I think I have answered it in response to your previous question regarding the position of Serbia vis-a-vis Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: Announcements have been made by the European Union about the possible abolition of visas for the citizens of the Balkans, Serbia in particular. Will it happen, in your opinion, and what would it mean for this part of the world?

A: We believe that this will not happen because Serbia acts in coordination and cooperation with Brussels and the Member States concerned, in order to solve this problem, i.e. reducing the number of asylum seekers to a minimum. They have been motivated by pure economic reasons, primarily caused by the current socio-economic crisis. Possible re-imposition of visas would adversely impact the overall situation and the mood of the citizens of Serbia towards the EU, and it is obvious that would have wider negative implications.

Q: Is the EU, at a time when itself confronted with numerous problems related to the crisis, really interested in the European integration processes of this part of the world? Recently, we had an opportunity to see for ourselves the negative comments in the context of Croatia which has already met the requirements for entry into the EU.

A: European Council conclusions open up the prospect of further enlargements as a long-term strategic EU commitment, which has not been brought into question. Although faced with problems within, the European Union is on its way to dealing with them in a positive manner, as confirmed also in the positions of highest-ranking EU officials at the recent European Council meeting. To illustrate this, I will mention the statement recently made by Lucinda Creighton, Minister of State for European Affairs of Ireland, who, when presenting the priorities of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, underlined that they were great enthusiasts

when speaking of the EU enlargement.