



Statement by FDPM and MFA H.E. Mr. Ivica Dačić at the informal meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC)

Mr. President,
Excellences,
My fellow Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to address you here in Banjaluka, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia. I wish to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Chairmanship-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process for organizing this meeting, giving us an opportunity to meet again and exchange views concerning the overall situation and current developments in the region. I would further like to commend the priorities of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Chairmanship focusing under the motto "Better Connectivity for Better Life" on further improving connectivity in the region, as the very foundation of the future progress of regional cooperation.

Dear colleagues,

It has been more than two decades since the launch of the South-East European Cooperation Process, and 18 years since the adoption of the Charter on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South Eastern Europe. During this period, the international circumstances have considerably changed compared to the last decade of the 20th century, giving the present-day-world a different appearance, with new challenges and threats, as well as new actors on the international stage. Nevertheless, there is still a need to improve regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations as a way of establishing peace and stability in the region. I must say that all of us together, in the spirit of solidarity, have been able to preserve regional stability, despite facing some recent challenges.

I find it necessary to underscore today, too, that accession to the European Union remains one of the priorities in the foreign policy of the Republic of Serbia. So far, fourteen chapters have been opened in the process of accession negotiations with the EU, 2 of which have been provisionally closed. I would like to emphasize that we do not perceive membership of the European Union as an end in itself – it is the negotiating process that we see as the main driver

to carry out fundamental reforms. We would very much look forward to an acceleration of the negotiations, hoping that all of the negotiating chapters supported by the necessary conditions will be opened in the near future, and that Serbia will be enabled to concentrate its efforts to make full use of the indicative 2025 accession date.

Despite the obstacles along the path to the EU accession, the period behind us has also witnessed some positive steps forward, such as the effort of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union to keep the Western Balkans high on the agenda, and the publication of "A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans" by the European Commission, a strategy indicating 2025 as a potential for Serbia and Montenegro to enter the European Union. The continuation of the EU integration process of the Republic of Serbia and of the entire region is also encouraged by the fact that the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2018 has also included the security of South-East Europe, and in this context a tangible progress on the integration of the Western Balkans, among the priorities of its Presidency. We also expect that the incoming EU Presidencies, including that of Romania as our next-door neighbour, will keep the enlargement theme on their agendas, it being one of the EU's most successful policies ever, which, according to our analyses, in no way contradicts the often mentioned need to reform the Union itself.

I would also like to single out the results of the reform agenda pursued by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and particularly those achieved in the economy. The implemented, tough and comprehensive reforms have resulted in fiscal consolidation and macroeconomic stability, and have led to a public debt reduction and budgetary surplus. Furthermore, the Republic of Serbia has managed to record a high economic growth, the highest in the last ten years according to the estimates by the European Commission and international financial institutions, even reaching 4.6%.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The pace of the Republic of Serbia's accession to the European Union is largely dependent on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, which is currently at its key stage. I must recall that we have shown readiness for compromise and put forward constructive proposals in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable, sustainable and lasting solution. I believe that we need to have open discussions and to give serious consideration to every option on the table, the best of which would, of course, be the one that both sides to the dialogue agree on. The understanding and support of our partners remains to be of the utmost importance on this challenging path.

The Republic of Serbia continues to maintain its resolute commitment to regional cooperation and readiness to play a substantive role in overcoming obstacles and misunderstandings of the past, aiming to achieve mutual reconciliation. Serbia's commitment to regional cooperation has also been reflected in its support to establishing new regional initiatives, such as the Western Balkans Fund, Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Chamber Investment Forum, the Transport Community, etc. The Republic of Serbia has also, to the best of its abilities, continued to contribute to the settlement of open regional issues and other disputes, thus acting as a predictable and credible partner in the region. We unambiguously support the economic

integration of our region, including the process of digitalization and infrastructural connectivity as being vital for success, as well as the ongoing activities aimed at reducing the international roaming service prices in the region.

Allow me to wish Bosnia and Herzegovina good luck and success in its SEECF Chairmanship-in-Office, and also to emphasize the continued readiness of the Republic of Serbia to contribute to the deepening of cooperation, in order for our region to remain an area of security, stability and good-neighbourly relations and become a region of prosperity for all.

Thank you for your attention.