



First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic attended a formal dinner addressing the participants of the 7th EU-SEE Summit "Sustainable recovery in the Balkans – Serbia in the lead role".

The Head of Serbian diplomacy underlined this evening that the strategic choice of Serbia was membership of the European Union, and that it had been proven by major reforms Serbia had been implementing, by harmonization with the European standards, strong political will to reach a sustainable compromise with Prishtina and regional cooperation promoted by Serbia.

The Head of Serbian diplomacy reminded the invitees that the EU Commission Enlargement Strategy defined 2025 as an indicative date for Serbia's accession to the EU and recognized it as a country which, along with Montenegro, had gone the farthest on its European integration path.

„The document opened up a new perspective for the countries in the region and it is important to seize the opportunity that has arisen".

He noticed, however, that the present moment was characterized by the challenges facing the European Union itself, which could influence the European integration process of the countries in the region, referring in particular to the migrant crisis, the upcoming MEP elections, reform of EU institutions, Brexit, etc. Nevertheless, he stressed that this should not be an excuse for us not to work even more intensely on our own reformation.

„The progress achieved by the countries in the region is a significant one and we cannot allow for it to be endangered as a consequence of possible unforeseen political movements within the EU and its surroundings", said the Minister, adding that it was important that the member states be clearer and more decisive in the messages they sent to the candidate countries and their citizens.

He underlined that strengthening regional cooperation was a complementary process to the EU

integration process, as well as a mechanism contributing to reconciliation and giving a new impetus to development. To illustrate the significant results achieved so far, he mentioned the opening of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office in Tirana, the Treaty Establishing the Transport Community in Belgrade, which should start its work by the end of this year, Chamber Investment Forum and the official launching of the Western Balkans Fund. He reminded that the Serbian government had undertaken a lot in the field of infrastructure, digitalization, energy, trade... and reiterated that for Serbia the highway Nis-Prishtina-Merdare-Tirana-Durres was a key priority, along with the reconstruction of rail infrastructure.

„For many years, the Balkans was a symbol of war, societal division, there are even examples of derogatory use of the name in some foreign languages, for example saying that balkanization cannot be permitted in their area... It is a question of a relative nature, whether the epithet does us justice. I think we are better than what others see us", said Dacic.

He also noticed that Ambassadors from many countries which often waged wars against each other and had clashing attitudes were this evening seated together, and that this was an example for our region to follow and to speed up, instead of often be guided by the expression „one step forward, two or three steps back".

Minister Dacic said also that Serbia supported all the countries in the region on their path to joining the EU and that it rejoiced over the success of each of them, because there are more things bringing us together than keeping us apart. He would like for 2025, the year which does not seem so far away, not to be an accession date constantly postponed.

„It is important that the region shows maturity, and that the past which we often interpret in opposing ways, and which cannot be erased, does not pose an obstacle, but rather be a motivation to step forward into the future."