



Following is the statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivo Dacic at the Belt and Road International Round Table:

"Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honour and distinct pleasure to open today's important meeting, which will, as I strongly believe, result not only in a better understanding of the Belt and Road initiative, but also in useful new ideas for its implementation.

The forward-looking Belt and Road combines, in a fascinating way, the paths paved two millennia ago, leading, along the Silk Road route, from China's Province of Shaanxi and the beautiful city of Xian, to Europe and beyond, with the contemporary ideas of globalization and connectivity, marking the 21st century.

In a world that we live in, the erstwhile Silk Road, translated into President Xi's ground-breaking Belt and Road initiative, is an idea of global integration based on a win-win cooperation premise and opening new doors for the prosperity of all countries, while constituting the basis of a multilateral approach in world affairs. The open-ended nature and the principle of equality inherent to this initiative are particularly worth noting, for it calls on all to take part in its undertakings and projects, even the smallest countries, depending on their interests.

Since 2013, the Belt and Road has developed from a chiefly economy-oriented initiative to a comprehensive cooperation format, involving culture, education, science and technology and thus contributing to stronger contacts and a better familiarization with and understanding of states. The intention to achieve synergy with other initiatives across the world and the national strategies of states opens up additional opportunities for its further development in many areas. Closer and stronger connectivity among states, working on joint projects and aspiring to common goals all contribute to a strengthened security environment, especially in view of the new challenges facing the world.

The Belt and Road is both changing the world and its map. Land routes, fast rails, bridges,

power plants, port facilities and industrial parks are all emerging along the New Silk Road route, in line with the global connectivity strategy agenda, while some projects are turning inaccessible grounds into main transport hubs.

At the time of launching the initiative in 2013, Serbia was among the first countries to have fully supported it and has continued to do so ever since. I am proud of the fact that today the relations between Serbia and China, characterized by a comprehensive strategic partnership and an intense political dialogue, are at their highest level of all time.

The geo-strategic position of Serbia and its exceedingly good relations with China have enabled it to be an important stop on the Belt and Road route and have facilitated its participation in many projects, mainly in the infrastructure sector. Thanks to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Serbia, though a landlocked country, will be connected to China via the Indian Ocean and the Aegean Sea, from the Port of Piraeus, the fast land-sea transport route via Greece and Macedonia, and the Belgrade-Budapest fast rail currently under construction, all the way to Central and Northern Europe. The development of the related infrastructure and involvement of new countries in the project should not be neglected either, which will undoubtedly result in increased trade exchange and new regional projects in various fields. Positive ideas are and will be assisted financially from the Silk Road Fund, earmarked by the Chinese side, offering an opportunity to both underdeveloped and developing countries to execute projects of national interest.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my belief that history will remember the Belt and Road by its positive contribution to global connectivity and to the economic development of all the participating countries. We in Serbia are pleased to have the opportunity to actively participate in such a capital project, bringing distant continents and regions closer together and bringing benefits globally.

Thank you for your attention."