



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic participated in the Berlin Process Foreign Ministers Meeting held today in Warsaw as part of the Polish Chairmanship-in-Office of the Berlin Process.

The meeting discussed aspects of the Berlin Process aimed at resolving outstanding bilateral issues among the Western Balkan participants. Furthermore, the meeting dealt with the preparations underway for the Western Balkans Summit to take place in Poznan on 5 July this year, in the framework of the Berlin Process.

The hosts informed the participants about the activities Warsaw carried out in preparation of the upcoming Summit – the key annual event of the Berlin Process.

The meeting was also an opportunity to exchange views on the situation in the region, regional cooperation and European perspective of the Western Balkans, i.e., the reforms being implemented in the region with EU facilitation.

The following is full text of the statement made by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at today's Berlin Process Foreign Ministers Meeting held in Warsaw under the Polish BP Chairmanship-in-Office:

Minister Czaputowicz,
Fellow Ministers,
Dear friends,

I wish you all a very good day and a fruitful meeting. Thank you for extending me the invitation to this important gathering. At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Poland, as the current Berlin Process Presidency, and my colleague, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz for the excellent organization of the Ministerial Meeting.

Serbia attaches great importance to the "Berlin Process" as a very fitting forum for strengthening regional cooperation, for promoting the reconciliation process and for encouraging overall regional development. The "Berlin Process" proves, yet again, to be an

important forum in spearheading the support to the EU integration of the Western Balkans through concrete projects and measures, which was its founding goal at the time when the "Berlin Process" was launched back in 2014.

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The Republic of Serbia supports the Polish Presidency's priorities in the "Berlin Process" framework: 1) Connectivity Agenda, with emphasis on energy and transport infrastructure and youth cooperation; 2) Economic and business cooperation; 3) Civil society and cultural cooperation; and 4) Security cooperation in the region, as an important segment of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. Promotion of security in fighting organized crime, terrorism and violent extremism is one of the Commission's six flagship initiatives identified as priorities as the Western Balkans transforms along its EU accession path.

We consider that the "Berlin Process" should remain focused on its original themes defined by the Berlin WB Summit in 2014 and the Vienna WB Summit in 2015. In that sense, attention should be devoted to exploring ways and means to fund the already agreed infrastructure projects under the Connectivity Agenda, which we perceive as one of the key pillars of the Berlin Process in general, and of our cooperation with the regional BP participants, as well as of the cooperation with the Process's EU Member States. Infrastructure is what connects us physically, creating preconditions for all other "connections" that we are striving for together in this, and in other regional formats. It is precisely infrastructure referred to within the Connectivity Agenda that the majority of citizens in our region well recognise as a qualitative step forward, made possible through our joint cooperation in the Berlin Process framework.

The Republic of Serbia will continue to participate constructively in all "Berlin Process" activities that serve to accelerate our European integration processes and bring benefits to the region as a whole.

Full-fledged EU membership is Serbia's key foreign policy priority. Not only Serbia, but the region as a whole, belongs in the EU and short of incorporating the entire Western Balkans, the common economic and political area in Europe will not be complete. In that sense, it is important to keep the enlargement high on the EU agenda. We would like to thank the Republic of Poland for its interest in this important issue and its encouragement within the Berlin Process, hoping that we shall manage to become a full-fledged EU member, together with Montenegro, during the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2025.

The Republic of Serbia is committed to the promotion of regional cooperation and determined to contribute to this goal. Having said that, on the one hand, we are guided by the principle to act as a reliable and predictable partner, and on the other, by the principle to adhere to all agreements reached, as a basis for mutual confidence-building and as a firm commitment to

further build upon. However, successful regional cooperation and its promotion require a strict adherence to all agreements reached and regional cooperation frameworks agreed by all participants in the region, without exception.

In that context, the imposition of additional taxes by Priština – in violation of the CEFTA agreement and the principles of Regional Economic Area (REA) – is seriously disrupting the overall regional cooperation. That is why we, once again, strongly urge that this decision, threatening the livelihood of ordinary citizens, be revoked as soon as possible and without any preconditions.

Despite regrettable conduct by Pristina, Belgrade has not resorted to any reciprocal measures as from the very start of the Dialogue with Pristina, has and has energetically opposed unilateral acts, as they cannot possibly be advantageous in reaching a compromise solution. On the contrary, they are dangerous and harmful, primarily to the region's stability and security of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Serbia is crucially interested in preserving the stability in the region with all regional participants seeking to fully cooperate in all areas, including economic and other forms of cooperation. We are of a view that could significantly contribute to building more positive atmosphere in the region, helping to solve inherited issues from the past.

We commend any progress in resolving open issues in the region including those concerning borders. In addition to political will, which I believe is not lacking, certain problems need to be addressed at an expert and technical level of understanding, which is already being dealt with by joint commissions. We should be aware that despite the fact that we do not have formal border agreements and border-related agreements, since negotiations are under-way, it does not interfere with citizens' everyday life. The negotiations often take time – and it is not only characteristic of the Balkans. It is quality of these solutions that really matters rather than quick fixes. For instance, we actively contributed along with our colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, to drafting a report on this subject demonstrating that cooperation is not only possible but also desirable, even when we have different approaches – hence the negotiations. We are working on resolving open issues, fully confident that we are contributing to stability in the region as well as to progress on the road to full EU membership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding my statement, I would like to highlight two very positive examples of cooperation in the Western Balkans – the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and the Western Balkans Fund. RYCO, fashioned after Franco-German Youth Office, is a direct and probably the most noteworthy result of our Berlin Process cooperation. We jointly follow their successes and contribute to them together. A format that you are probably less familiar with is that of the Western Balkans Fund, modelled upon the International Visegrad Fund. Several years of complex negotiations on establishing the WBF, allowed us to overcome numerous obstacles, while the documents produced during this demanding process were then utilised for the

establishment of RYCO.

I will meet my Western Balkans colleagues after this meeting in the format of the WBF Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and approve the 24 new projects produced by Western Balkans civil society organizations that the Fund will support in the next twelve months. This year, we made a joint decision to double our individual contributions to the WBF from 30,000 to 60,000 EUR which is a rare example of joint ownership and commitment in our region. I call upon you, dear colleagues, to learn more about this important mechanism designed to encourage and support civil society cooperation, either through your diplomatic missions or directly. Most importantly, I encourage you dear colleagues to consider pledging matching funding contributions to the Western Balkans Fund equal to those of its six founders in a gesture of concrete support to this valuable Western Balkans joint endeavour.

Thank you!

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