



Address of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic at the opening session of the third international scientific conference "Belt and Road": Serbia and 16 + 1 initiative: experiences, achievements and perspectives"

Distinguished Professor Cvetkovic,
Excellency, Distinguished Ambassador Chen Bo,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It gives me great honor and pleasure to address you today at the opening session of the international scientific conference "Belt and Road": Serbia and 16 + 1 initiative: experiences, achievements and perspectives", co-organized for a third consecutive year by the Faculty of Security Studies and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China.

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Only a week ago, the eighth summit of the Prime Minister of China and CEE countries was held in Dubrovnik on 11-12 April 2019, in which Prime Minister of Serbia Ana Brnabic took place. Today, we are just one week away from the second Belt and Road International Forum to be held in Beijing from 25-27 April 2019, in which Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic will participate along with 37 other Heads of State or Government, representatives from 137 countries and 80 international organizations including 2,000 delegates at various levels. Beijing will be in the focus of the international community next week and the Republic of Serbia is prepared to make its full contribution to the success of this international event which is undoubtedly one of the most significant ones in the current year.

We are heartened by the intensity with which we jointly build and develop cooperation with friendly China and other countries from the region and the broader international community included in the Belt and Road initiative launched by President Xi Jinping, certainly one of the

most important in modern history of mankind. I would like to emphasize that Serbia attaches great importance to cooperation between the China and CEE countries mechanism, pervading the Belt and Road initiative, by promoting connections in the fields of economy, infrastructure and energy, health-care, media, culture, science, education, sports, tourism, cooperation between the region and cities and cooperation in international organizations and fora. We are particularly pleased with the fact that Belgrade, as part of cooperation between China and CEE countries, hosted last year two major events – third meeting of the Ministers of Transport and Meeting of Mayors of Capitals of CEE countries and China, held in October in 2018, while Serbia will host an important China-CEE cooperation meeting on innovation in 2019.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The recent China-CEE summit in Dubrovnik reaffirmed the vitality of this cooperation mechanism reflected in the first enlargement since its establishment, by admission of Greece to full membership. Turning mechanism "16+1" to "17+1" carries a great potential in view of international and regional importance of Greece, its strategic position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa and an economic potential for comprehensive trade cooperation between China and Europe.

Serbia as well is one of the major points along the New Silk Road in Europe. Its geostrategic position enabled our country to be one of the crossing points between the New Silk Road and China-Europe land-sea express line symbolized by a new fast-track Belgrade-Budapest railway. Other states in the region as well expressed an interest in this transport connection.

So far many results have been achieved and significant progress has been made in strengthening the overall economic cooperation, though a lot of work needs yet to be done. We hold in high regard the activities and constructive proposals of the Chinese side and the efforts of all participants towards strengthening efficiency, as well as defining a framework and structure for cooperation particularly in terms of concrete projects. We note with pleasure that at the Eighth China-CEEC summit in Dubrovnik, Serbia and the PR of China signed the agreements in the field of road infrastructure (Pozega-Boljare and Novi Beograd-Surcin sections) and the cooperation between Post Office Savings Bank and the China Development Bank. We are prepared to sign even more agreements in Beijing in a few days, primarily regarding infrastructure transport projects. The adoption of the Plan of bilateral cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the People's Republic of China within the Belt and Road initiative is also important.

Moreover, there has been a significant increase in Chinese direct investments in Serbia over the past two years. Let me mention some of the most important ones - HBIS privatization of the Smederevo Ironworks, Zijin privatization of RTB Bor and Shandong Lilong investment in Zrenjanin proving China's confidence in Serbia, a country in which the Chinese partners may take advantage of a stable investment climate, to the benefit of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens.

We are also glad that a growing number of Chinese citizens recognized what Serbia has to offer as a gateway between the East and the West and in view of its vast cultural and historical

heritage attracting an ever larger number of Chinese tourists which doubled in 2018 compared to the previous year.

Finally, I would like to point out our excellent bilateral relations, comprehensive strategic partnership and traditional friendship between the Republic of Serbia and the PR of China. Our relations, assessed by both sides as "modern iron-clad friendship" is characterized by mutual trust and respect and a shared wish to develop ties in all areas.

Let me also take this opportunity to wish a lot of happiness and further success to the People's Republic of China and friendly Chinese people, particularly this year on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China and we wholeheartedly join all well-wishers.

Hoping that the Conference will be a success, I thank you for your attention wishing you a successful work.

Thank you.

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