



Address of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic to students of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna on a visit tour to Belgrade:

"Excellencies,
Dear students,
Distinguished guests,

At the very beginning, I would like to welcome you to Belgrade and Serbia and express my distinct pleasure that student visits of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have become a tradition. That is entirely understandable taking into account the geographic proximity between Serbia and Austria, their ties in history as well as an excellent bilateral cooperation between the two countries which is stable, diverse and multi-faceted.

{youtube}2mdANdVTX9c{/youtube}

I would like to take this opportunity to present an important historical fact. Way back in 1836 diplomatic relations between the two countries were established when Antun Mihanovic, a consul of the Austrian Empire in Belgrade at that time, presented credentials to prince Milos Obrenovic. The friendly relations between Serbia and Austria have a several decades-long tradition. Although these relations went through different phases, today they can be characterized as friendly, strong and successful. Our dialogue is dynamic and vibrant, as can be seen from the fact that in October and November last the entire Austrian state leadership visited Serbia: President Alexander Van der Bellen, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka. This summer, we expect Minister of Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl to visit us. As one of major investors in Serbian economy, Austria is a hugely important trading partner to our country. Last year alone, commodity exchange between Serbia and Austria was more than a billion euro.

Dear students,

The Republic of Serbia, as all other countries in the world, has set clear foreign policy priorities. In this short address, I will try to acquaint you with the role of our country at the international

scene because I am certain that this is what you are most interested in.

The preservation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity, with Kosovo and Metohija as its integral part, is our top foreign policy priority along with full EU membership. The maintenance of regional peace and stability, good-neighborly relations, development of bilateral cooperation with leading factors in the global political arena and with other states, including military neutrality are issues topping this list.

By defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity, Serbia is at the same time defending international law, Charter of the United Nations and the supreme authority of the UN Security Council thus contributing to international peace.

I would like to point out that the unilateral declaration of independence of "Kosovo" in February 2008, is not only contrary to international peace and the Helsinki Final Act, more specifically its principles 3 and 4, but also to UN Security Council resolution 1244 adopted in 1999 in line with the Charter of the United Nations which is why the UDI constitutes a flagrant violation of the norms on which the entire international legal order is based.

Ever since the onset of dialogue with Pristina, Serbia has always acted as a constructive partner fulfilling its obligations and implementing agreements unlike the other side that by its irresponsible behavior obstructed agreements and evaded search for a solution. Even six years after the signing of the Brussels Agreement, a Community of Serb Municipalities has not been established, whose task would have been to protect the interests of the Serb community in the Province. In these circumstances, the presence of UNMIK in southern Serbian Province in undiminished scope and with unchanged mandate is extremely important since it guarantees security of Serbian and other non-Albanian population. Also, in accordance with UNSC resolution 1244, an important role in the protection of Serbian population, cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo and Methija, is played by KFOR.

I would like to emphasize that due to active diplomatic efforts undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, its institutions and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the international level, over the past 18 months as many as 13 states decided to revoke their decision on UDI recognition. We expect this trend to continue.

Full EU membership is Serbia's foreign policy and strategic goal. A prospect of becoming a full-fledged EU member gives a powerful encouragement to comprehensive reforms we have embarked upon as well as to the policy of reconciliation and regional cooperation. In that context, our country is advocating good-neighborly relations and dialogue as the main tool for resolving outstanding questions among neighbors.

That is why Serbia is an active participant in regional initiatives, aware that European perspective of the entire Western Balkan region contributes to reconciliation, preservation of stability and creation of favorable conditions conducive to cooperation in many other areas in these territories.

However, what is specific for Serbia's European integration process is Chapter 35 related to

progress in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina which to a large extent determines the course of the entire process by conditioning steps to be made in other areas.

Unfortunately, the steps taken by Pristina lead in the opposite direction, away from the dialogue which is currently deadlocked. Allow me to make it very clear that the sole responsibility for the breakdown of dialogue lies with Pristina and its irresponsible decision to impose 100 percent tariffs on goods from Serbia proper, thus additionally exacerbating already difficult circumstances of the Serbian population living in Kosovo and Metohija. Even though Serbia is truly committed to dialogue with Pristina as the only way to reach a compromise solution, it will be possible to resume it only if these tariff measures are lifted. Despite the difficulties, Serbia will continue to push with reforms, regardless of the pace of the dialogue, since we feel that this is in the interest of all our citizens and that it contributes to overall progress of the country and stability of the region.

I would like to stress again that we highly appreciate steady support of Austria given to us along our European path. Having said that, I primarily have in mind political support within the European Union and concrete assistance through the implementation of the twinning projects whereby institutions of Member States support the institutions of EU candidate countries, an area where Austria has vast experience and capacity. Agreements regulating economic cooperation are a good example of this, like very important readmission agreements and those on international cooperation against illicit drug trafficking and international terrorism.

Dear guests,

One of my country's key foreign policy priorities is also preservation of peace and security in the region. We are all aware that the present-day world is faced all the time with serious challenges like terrorism, growing cybercrime, threats to energy stability.

Serbia shares concerns over these issues with other countries in the Balkans, which has always been a meeting place of competing interests and geopolitical concerns of major powers and which was a transit route, as you know, connecting Western Europe and the Middle East. That is why compromise and flexibility are needed more than ever.

Serbia is therefore open for cooperation with its partners in the region, Europe and the world at large and with its activities in the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international and regional organizations and initiatives, it makes a steady contribution to strengthening of peace, stability and economic progress in these territories. As a good neighbor, Serbia will always be an honest partner to all those prepared to share with us a burden of responsibility in implementing joint historic undertaking to build a developed and prosperous region and will continue to do everything in her power to preserve and encourage positive processes in this part of Europe.

Speaking of Serbia and Austria in the context of regional cooperation, it is impossible not to mention the Danube as a link connecting us. The Danube and the Danube region are one of the most prosperous regions with 110 million residents. Also, we should not forget that Serbia together with Austria participated in working out the EU Danube strategy, encompassing

cooperation in the field of strengthening communication and infrastructure-building, environmental protection, promotion of tourism and cultural achievements. In addition to cultural and economic, I would also like to single out police cooperation between our two countries as yet another contribution to the preservation of stability in the region.

In addition to maintaining a balanced and diversified cooperation with the great powers like USA, Russian Federation and PR of China, the Republic of Serbia is working hard to preserve good cooperation with African, Asian, South American and Caribbean countries. Even though we pursue the policy of military neutrality, in other words not seeking membership in any military alliance, this is not preventing us from pursuing partner cooperation with both NATO and the Russian Federation. Austria is an excellent example proving that such form of cooperation is not impossible as well as some other military neutral countries. Owing to its Partnership for Peace program with NATO, Serbia is currently participating in five UN peace-keeping operations and four EU missions.

In fulfilling its foreign policy goals, Serbia is guided by its legitimate national interests, using diplomacy and dialogue as tools, seeking to additionally promote traditionally good relations with friends and improve relations with those partners in the international community with whom we differ on certain issues, agreeing to disagree and guided by fundamental principles of international law.

Distinguished guests,

At the very end of my today's statement, I cannot help mentioning a sizeable Serbian community in Austria. Serbs have been present there since 1526 making an immeasurable contribution in defense of European values. According to the official Austrian data, more than 120,000 Serbs are living in that country while according to the unofficial statistics, they may even be around 300,000.

Citizens of Austria of Serbian descent represent today a well-integrated community active in the Serb Alliance as well as in many clubs and associations making a dynamic contribution to the development of Austrian social, economic and cultural scene and making a huge potential for further development of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Allow me to once again wish you a pleasant stay in Serbia and a lot of success in your future work," the Serbian Foreign Minister concluded his address to the students.

{joomplucat:1646 limit=4|columns=4}