



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic at a reception on the occasion of the celebration of the Serbian Diplomacy Day:

Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

They say that "a diplomat is a man who thinks twice before he says nothing". I hope that this will not be the case today.

It gives me particular honor and pleasure to address you today especially since such a large number of you honored us with your presence. Today, for the fifth year in a row, and five years after I have taken over this Ministry, we mark the Day of Serbian Diplomacy – in honor of past generations that pursued this noble profession throughout history of the Serbian state.

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In the past five years, as head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I visited 102 world countries out of 193, crossing more than 1.100.000 kilometers and flying around the globe 29 times. In that period, we achieved admirable diplomatic results. Let me mention some of them: preventing the adoption of resolution on Srebrenica in the UN Security Council, OSCE Chairmanship, assuming Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, preventing the so-called Republic of Kosovo from joining UNESCO and INTERPOL and other international organizations, mounting the first exhibition on Jasenovac at UN Headquarters in New York. Moreover, in that period only seven countries recognized so-called Republic of Kosovo while 13

revoked their recognition.

Let me recall that 29 May has been chosen as the Day of Serbian Diplomacy since it was on that day, 180 years ago exactly, that the Prince's Office conducting external affairs was established, the event considered as the beginning of professional diplomacy in Serbia. The first institution dealing with foreign affairs in then Principality of Serbia, consisting of only 13 clerks, was headed by Avram Petronijevic, previously a personal secretary of Milos Obrenovic. At that time, Serbia had just a few diplomatic missions in our region - in Turkey (Ottoman Empire), Russia and Austria while today, 180 years on, it has more than 100 diplomatic/consular missions abroad spanning all continents. There are 499 diplomatic officers and administrative staff performing duties in the country and 519 posted abroad. Of that number, 220 diplomats are assigned to their duties at home and 260 abroad.

Speaking of anniversaries, allow me at the outset to paraphrase an anecdote of a famous American writer Robert Frost who once wrote that a diplomat was a man who always remembers a woman's birthday but never remembers her age. Even though Frost was probably thinking of men when he referred to diplomats, I am proud to say that close to one half of our diplomatic staff are women, many occupying the highest-ranking diplomatic positions. Today, I would like to pay a special tribute to my lady colleagues.

In addition to this important anniversary, today we also mark the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Diplomatic Archive in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a responsible and professional guardian of the archive documents of exceptional value to foreign policy of our state and its international position throughout the history. These materials include some of the diplomatic documents and international treaties firmly embedded in the very foundations of the 20th century international order. I am pleased to note that some of these documents have been put on display today and I invite you to take a look at them following the official part of the ceremony. Since its foundation, the Diplomatic Archive had performed a conventional archival function, with the organization of work similar to the archives of other Ministries in the world. The Diplomatic Archive today handles archival documents covering the work of the Ministry in the period from 1945 onwards and stores close to 4,000 meters long archive documents used for regular activities of the Ministry as well as for other institutions dealing with the country's foreign policy or research activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to make my statement as brief as possible, I shall today avoid attempts to define diplomacy as a calling and profession or a way of communication among the states, or dwell on a historical background of Serbian diplomatic service. Instead, I would like to point out that diplomacy is very much relevant in the 21st century despite many predictions that it will take a back seat or perhaps even totally cease to exist in the face of modern means of communication, social networks and unstoppable advance of the modern information society. On the contrary, it is fairly certain that we need diplomacy as much as before if not more, as a profession, as a way of resolving disputes through agreements and compromise, and as a way of promoting cooperation and friendship among states and peoples. We also need new generations of diplomats, highly educated, embracing clear and proper principles, tolerance, speaking world

and regional languages and equipped with computer skills. In that sense, it is highly appropriate to quote Andric according to whom a good diplomat is a well-balanced sum of good qualities rather than the value of each of these qualities individually. Recognizing the importance of a strong diplomatic service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to foster and educate, regularly replenish, promote and upgrade its diplomatic staff, keeping alive the memory and gratitude to colleagues who indebted the diplomatic service of this country over the past decades.

Distinguished friends,

In the past year as well, Serbian diplomacy was active and diligent. We have been strengthening comprehensive cooperation with our traditional friends, seeking to be a good neighbour in the region to the regional states but also endeavouring to make some new friends around the globe or at least add sparkle to some old friendships. I proudly emphasize that in the past year alone, Serbia established diplomatic relations with five countries from the Caribbean and Asia/Pacific regions, making our voice heard also in these faraway quarters of the world. We are seeking to open new diplomatic/consular missions and bring our country closer to citizens of some states who often do not know much about us.

I am particularly proud of the fact that we strengthened and enriched our contacts with the countries in Africa, South America and the Caribbean as well as in Asia. In the past two years alone, I paid 18 visits to the countries in Africa and the Middle East and travelled to 12 states in South America and the Caribbean and 5 states in Asia. Foreign Ministers and highest-ranking officials from all over the world visited Belgrade. President of the Republic Aleksandar Vučić, the Prime Minister, our Government Ministers, Parliamentarians and all others sincerely and enthusiastically defending the interests of our country around the globe are making an outstanding contribution to overall diplomatic activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Serbia is not abandoning compromise or diplomacy as a means of resolving disputes even when we are dealing with the highest state priority question – Kosovo and Metohija. We remain committed to the principles of international law, the reached agreements and are prepared to continue the dialogue once the conditions are set in place. Serbia's constructive position has been unquestionably acknowledged by many countries in the world which is best illustrated by the fact that a total of 13 states decided to revoke recognition of the UDI of "Kosovo" as well as by the fact that the so-called Republic of Kosovo has not been able to become a member of international organizations, above all UNESCO and INTERPOL, since a majority of countries clearly opposing this understand that the international order has to rely on the respect of generally accepted principles and norms of international law rather than on unilateral acts most directly derogating and violating these norms and principles.

Irrational and highly harmful refusal of Pristina to withdraw its decision on the imposed tariffs, including subsequent provocations and unilateral acts, like the brutal attack against northern Kosovo and Metohija that took place yesterday, clearly indicate that Pristina makes it impossible to conduct new rounds of dialogue. Therefore, today of all days, we are urging that with a

rational, responsible and sincere approach, we give another chance to diplomacy since this is the least that we owe to future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity as well to reiterate that membership of the European Union is one of the strategic foreign policy priorities of Serbia. In a situation when the United Kingdom is leaving the EU, the challenges within the Union and diminishing interest in the enlargement policy, our diplomacy is faced with a complex task of securing further EU Member States and institutions' support to Serbia's negotiating process.

Despite the fact that our efforts and the results achieved on the European path have not been adequately reflected on the pace of the accession process, progress we made cannot be denied. In this context, I hope that our efforts will be acknowledged with the opening of new negotiating chapters by the end of Romania's Presidency of the Council of the EU as well as during the upcoming Finnish Presidency.

Let me also recall that Serbia is a sitting member of the UNESCO Executive Board with a prominent role owing to its active approach and constructive action. Previous year, Serbia decided to submit its candidature for re-election to this UNESCO body, for the upcoming four-year term, desirous of continuing our engagement in promoting the mandate of the Organization in the fields of education, science and culture, believing that this is a safe investment in the future.

The preservation of peace and security at regional and global levels, as well as security cooperation in its broadest sense remain a foreign policy priority of our country. Serbia is firmly committed to responding to many security challenges of the present day, including terrorism, all forms of extremism, cyber threats and challenges pertaining to energy security, as phenomena of the time we live in.

I wish to underline that our commitment to the EU Common Security and Defence Policy has been demonstrated by our readiness, in line with our capacities, to make a contribution to European policies in this area, by continuing our participation in UN- and EU-mandated missions and operations. Serbia is currently participating in four EU missions and five UN-mandated missions and operations. Today, 279 personnel of our country's security forces are deployed in multinational missions and operations, making Serbia the ninth European contributor to peacekeeping missions and ranking first in the Western Balkans region.

We continue to strengthen comprehensive bilateral cooperation with the Russian Federation and China as our traditional friends, linked by strategic relations and ironclad friendship. In the past period, visits were exchanged at the high and highest level with the Russian Federation which yielded concrete and tangible results. At the same time, bilateral cooperation with China was strengthened including an important segment of cooperation within "17+1" format and the "Belt and Road" initiative.

In the previous period, we concluded a significant number of agreements liberalizing visa

regime with countries the world over, and the Passport Index portal ranked the Serbian passport as the 28th worldwide. Holders of Serbian travel documents are able to enter as many as 127 countries without a visa or obtain one at a border crossing point, and it is our sincere hope that this number will continue to grow. Last year, Serbian consular network was expanded by two consular offices, in Trebinje and Drvar, particularly important for Serbs living in Herzegovina and Bosanska Krajina. Moreover, ten new Honorary Consulates were opened, headed by distinguished individuals and friends of Serbia, who will offer assistance to our nationals and create new business opportunities for our country in the U.S., Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, Madagascar, Australia and New Zealand.

An important segment of the activity of the Ministry I am heading has also been the program of Cooperation with the diaspora and Serbs in the region. As their mother country, it is the interest of Serbia that all its nationals and persons belonging to Serbian communities abroad enjoy all individual and collective rights guaranteed under international conventions, bilateral agreements and national legislation in these countries. Which is why we have through all our activities endeavoured to provide assistance to Serbs abroad to successfully integrate in the countries they live in, preserving at the same time their cultural and national identity. We have supported the fostering of such identity through activities safeguarding the Serbian language and Cyrillic script, culture, national history, protection and promotion of heritage, as well as by promoting Serbian language media and all forms of association of members of Serbian diaspora in the region. We remain permanently committed to adjusting our diplomatic and consular network to the needs of Serbian people, convinced that in this way we are contributing to the strengthening of diaspora organizations and associations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Esteemed excellencies, dear colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I wish you a very happy Diplomacy Day! May we celebrate it together for a long time and be successful to the benefit of peace and prosperity, and in the service of citizens and the state of Serbia!

Long live Serbia!

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