



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the formal ceremony delivering apartment keys to refugees in Vrnjacka Banja:

"Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

As of today, Vrnjacka Banja, a gem of Serbian spa tourism and one of the most beautiful sights to see in the Republic of Serbia, will receive twice more recognition due to our event. Much like it has adorned our country, Vrcnjacka Banja will be embellished by smiles of twenty refugee families from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia, to whom we today deliver keys to 20 apartments.

Being the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, I was appointed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia as Chair of the Commission for Coordination of the Process of Permanent Integration of Refugees.

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Given that the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme has been long underway, I have the honour at this point and great pleasure to as often as once a week take part in formal ceremonies delivering keys to the families who, more than twenty years since the end of conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, have an opportunity to have a steady home in the Republic of Serbia and who by opening the doors of their new flats at the same time close the chapters of their lives marked by traumatizing memories of persecution, loss of their beloved ones and all of the suffering they endured. Therefore, I do not see my chairing of the Commission as a duty, I feel honoured instead for being able to share with you the joy of a new beginning.

One such project includes many institutions and individuals and we are here today owing to the

commitment and dedication they have shown. Allow me to welcome Mr. Steffen Hudolin, a representative of the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, the EU being the largest contributor to the Regional Housing Programme. This project has been an illustrative example reflecting the mutual support and cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Serbia.

It is my pleasure to also welcome our dear friend Mr. Hans Schodder, UNHCR Resident Coordinator in Serbia. UNHCR and the OSCE have been monitoring the beneficiary selection procedure carried out by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia in cooperation with municipal authorities.

The importance of this project has been recognized by many and we also have here with us today Mr. Vladimir Cucic - Commissioner for Refugees and Migration, Mr. Bojan Stevic – State Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, and the Mayor of Vrnjacka Banja, Mr. Boban Djurovic, whom I wish to thank for the warm hospitality extended to us.

The construction of housing units in Vrnjacka Banja was carried out in the framework of the Regional Housing Programme Subproject 4 and amounts to EUR 18.6 million, of which EUR 16.6 million was provided from the Regional Housing Programme Fund set up by the Council of Europe Development Bank. The remaining EUR 2 million were a national-level contribution by the Republic of Serbia. A total of 261 housing units to accommodate 1,233 families are currently being built within this Subproject. The flats have been built and delivered to the users in six out of 13 municipalities, while the construction works are being completed on remaining locations. Apart from the buildings here in Vrnjacka Banja, Subproject 4 provided housing solutions to 15 families in Arilje, 11 in Zrenjanin, 30 in Loznica, 10 in Kladovo and 20 families in Negotin.

Without the support of local communities, we could hardly imagine having any success in resolving this complex problem, which is why it is incumbent upon me to stress the special role played by the local communities in offering assistance to and ensuring the integration of refugees in a new community. I can proudly say that all local communities in Serbia, with no exceptions, have shown their solidarity and helped the refugees in their darkest hour, much like they support their integration today, including through the Regional Housing Programme.

Dear friends,

Memories can never be fully forgotten, but I am more than certain that at this point in time, today, we are creating some new memories which see you all in the peace and warmth of your homes, which warms my heart too, as I am witness to these moments, future good memories of a brighter and more peaceful future – a legacy of peace for your ancestors!

Therefore, my friends, I advise you to leave the painful memories behind, put a broad smile on your face and open the door to a future that you deserve. Allow me to use this beautiful moment that will always remain in our hearts to wrap up and thank you for the honour of being able to together with you write pages of a better future and share your joy as you approach it.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you all the best!"

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