



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic met today in Belgrade with Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Taro Kono, who is on a day-long visit to Serbia.

Minister Dacic said that he was pleased with the fact that after 18 years a Foreign Minister of Japan was visiting Serbia and that this visit as well as the announcement that Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic would attend the Japanese Emperor Naruhito enthronement ceremony in October testify to the deepening of Belgrade-Tokyo relations.

"We are proud of the long-standing tradition of political relations with Japan", said the Serbian Foreign Minister, noting that he and Japan's Minister agreed today to proclaim 1882 the Year of Friendship between the two countries, as this was the year when correspondence was established between Serbian King Milan Obrenovic and Japanese Emperor Meiji.

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"This means that our preparations for marking the 140th anniversary of the friendship between Serbia and Japan in 2020 begin as early as today", said Dacic, adding that Belgrade would also invite the Imperial Family to pay a visit to our country.

He stressed that the bilateral relations between Serbia and Japan kept improving at both political and economic levels and underlined an intensified interest of Japanese investors for the Serbian market.

Minister Dacic thanked his Japanese counterpart over the fact that his country abstained in the votes when UNESCO and Interpol decided on the admission of Kosovo, despite having recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo.

"We highly appreciate this, as we believe that all should wait until the dialogue is completed and a compromise reached, instead of making any unilateral moves such as attempting to join certain international organizations", said the Serbian Foreign Minister.

The Minister said that he had conveyed to his Japanese counterpart that Serbia aimed for peace, agreement and compromise, but that it could not accept unilateral acts which threatened its national and state interests.

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"Our economic relations have been on the upswing, gaining momentum, including an increased presence of Japanese companies on our market", said Dacic, adding that the foreign trade in goods with Japan last year amounted to EUR 180 million, an increase compared to the earlier period, but that the trade in value terms could be even higher. Furthermore, he said that Serbia had an interest for cooperation in the fields of science and technology, innovation, technology development, sports, etc.

The Serbian Foreign Minister expressed gratitude to Japan for donations in technology and funds, noting that in the last 20 years Japan provided to Serbia a total of EUR 507 million in donations.

Minister Taro Kono said that visits of the two countries' officials should be arranged more often and thanked Minister Dacic for the hospitality.

"Our bilateral relations have expanded significantly since the visit of Prime Minister Abe last year", said Taro Kono and added that today he discussed with the Serbian Foreign Minister the ways to advance our bilateral relations in various areas, while agreeing to begin preparations for the marking of the 140th anniversary of friendship.

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"We also exchanged views on how to advance our economic relations", he said, adding that Serbia had a pool of high-skilled workforce and that it had demonstrated remarkable progress in economic reform and fiscal consolidation. As he said, the Japanese Foreign Minister believed that it was the most important to provide information to Japanese business people about the environment Serbia had to offer.

"Stability in the Western Balkans is not only a regional issue of Europe", he stressed and added that it was also a strategic issue for Japan.

"Japan welcomes Serbia's role in promoting peace and stability in the Western Balkans region, and will continue to support socio-economic reforms of Serbia toward EU accession. Japan also encourages intra-regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries", said Taro Ono.

Noting that Japan would next year host the Tokyo Olympics, the Foreign Minister of Japan underlined that Serbia was famous as a great sports nation and wished success to all Serbian athletes.

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