



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić at the opening of CEAS's VII Belgrade NATO Week :

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and great pleasure to make an address at the opening of the 7th Belgrade NATO Week, together with Ambassador Ildem, Assistant NATO Secretary General for Public Diplomacy. At the very outset I would like to thank Ms. Milić and the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS) for the invitation. Persistence and commitment of CEAS and its Director Ms. Milić are to be respected while their dedicated work resulted in making this event one of the best opportunities for in-depth discussions on current topics, attended by prominent speakers and ever larger audience. At the same time, this event is a good opportunity to put additional light on the essence and range of cooperation between Serbia and NATO, the situation in the region as well as on the relations between Serbia and the key players in global politics.

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I would like to underline that the very metaphor "Walk through walls", indicated in the theme of the event, is very up-to-date and reflects the reality in the best possible way. Serbia is making efforts towards removing and overcoming barriers and walls. Serbia is convinced that its task is connectivity and not separation and closing up in one's own backyard void of understanding the concerns and interests of other players on both regional and international political stage. This approach constitutes the main premise of building mutual trust in the region and beyond. Our aim is to look to the future but also to be ready to settle the issues of the past in a fair manner, protecting, at the same time, in the best possible way, the key national interests.

Serbia positioned itself as an accountable, predictable and credible partner on the international stage, contributing to the preservation of peace and promotion of security in the region, while sharing responsibility on the broader level in the promotion of conflict resolution and in suppressing the security challenges. Foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia: protection of the sovereignty of our country, EU membership, promotion of regional cooperation

and fostering of friendly and partner relations on global level, asserted its role as an exporter of security and an important factor for solving many, primarily regional issues.

Serbia strives to develop as good as possible relations with the major players on the international political stage, thus making our own security sustainable. On the other hand, being an EU candidate country, Serbia is making a full contribution to the promotion of stability in this part of Europe, which is of huge significance for the overall European security. This thesis was also confirmed in the EU's Global Strategy clearly emphasizing that the credible enlargement policy represents an investment in security and prosperity of the entire Europe.

Serbia, on its part, works actively on the adoption of draft texts of new strategic documents such as the National Security and Defence Strategy, which will be aligned with the mentioned EU Global Strategy. This approach is the best evidence of Serbia being ready to participate in new European initiatives whenever the conditions are created for it. I recall that in the past period too, our country joined many concepts of European policies in the field of the EU Common Defence and Security Policy, thus demonstrating its commitment to the European orientation.

Serbia is continuously raising regional matters aimed at increasing attractiveness and appeal of the entire Western Balkans, which should result in more investments and trade increase, being the basis for an accelerated economic development. That is why Serbia perseveres in promoting projects which go beyond national borders and which are a pledge for the future. The initiative launched by President Vučić and Prime Ministers Edi Rama and Zoran Zaev concerning the so-called regional "Mini-Schengen" which, I hope, will be supported by other regional players too and should create conditions for speedier flow of people and capital, but also to enable prosperity of the entire region with simultaneous strengthening of stability. The connectivity issue must overpower the issues of separation.

Distinguished participants,

Partner relations with NATO have been an important segment of the Serbian state policy and of our endeavours to ensure lasting stability in the region. Our cooperation with NATO is based on a clear premise and hinges on the respect for the policy of military neutrality pursued by Serbia, without conditioning our country to join the Alliance. At the same time, Serbia has shown an openness to further promote the political dialogue and practical cooperation with NATO in all areas of mutual interest. We largely owe the improved level of understanding between us to an enhanced top-level dialogue, in which context I would like to point out the good relationship between President Vučić and NATO Secretary-General Mr. Stoltenberg, but also regular annual visits and sharing of experiences at other political and military levels.

Last week we have successfully brought to an end the procedure for adopting the new cycle of Serbia-NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) for the period 2019-2021, which is the theme of a special panel here at this event. The new IPAP ensures continuity with the initial IPAP cycle, which was implemented with success, with many of its actions remaining part of the new document given its long-term character, while being closely related to the implementation of reforms in many social sectors. In this way, we have affirmed once again the positive trend characterizing our relations, high intensity of our partner cooperation and a commitment to

common goals.

I cannot but help recalling the fact that Serbia-NATO relations have been extremely delicate, above all owing to the legacy of the past, i.e., the NATO bombing of then FR Yugoslavia. I remind you with regret that in 1999, NATO intervened with no authorization of the UN Security Council, which to us undoubtedly represents an act of aggression against a sovereign country, which took a huge toll on human life and caused vast material destruction. These events we can never forget and we will always remember those who had lost their lives. Earlier this year we commemorated with a solemn program, in a dignified manner, 20 years since this tragedy occurred, aiming to send a universal message that no sovereign country can experience anything similar ever again. Serbia is also aware that even after 20 years, our views of the 1999 events differ. This, however, does not change the reality that all those involved in these events have a responsibility and an obligation to do their utmost to maintain peace and ensure durable stability in the region through cooperation. Each side has its own share of responsibility to bear towards the achievement of this goal: Serbia as a NATO partner, its neighbours that are either NATO members or aspire to membership, the most powerful of the NATO member states, but also the Alliance as a whole.

Nevertheless, Serbia looks to the future and is committed to promoting cooperation in the field of defence and security with NATO members and partner countries. The policy of military neutrality, as a foundation of our policy not only towards NATO but any other military alliance as well, is not brought into question. Such a clear and firm orientation of ours has been met with respect by both the East and the West. At the same time, Serbia fully respects the decision of some of our neighbours to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or any other military alliances. Therefore, we expect that an understanding be shown for our contacts maintained with non-NATO countries based on the principles of all-round cooperation, while pursuing a policy of military neutrality. The activities carried out by Serbia and their nature, including military and other exercises with countries that are not part of NATO, are not to the detriment of the country's relations with the Alliance or any of its member states individually.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

A segment of special importance to Serbia's cooperation with NATO which significantly affects the public perception of the Alliance in Serbia, is the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, the biggest political and security challenge for our country. Serbia and NATO have obligations under UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and the Military Technical Agreement, and the implementation of these obligations is an imperative for our side. We expect the Alliance to recognize and support our priorities with understanding, especially insofar as Kosovo and Metohija. We are of the view that only a compromise solution reached in dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina can ensure a lasting peace and stability. There is no reason whatsoever that something agreed by the two sides would be unacceptable to any third parties. We are convinced that each agreement on the resolution of outstanding questions is encouraging to the maintenance of peace and stability in the region.

I would like to point out that Serbia is vehemently opposed to the transformation of so-called "Kosovo Security Force" into so-called "Army of Kosovo" since it is in violation of UNSC

resolution 1244 (1999) and undermines regional and broader stability. A unilateral decision on the part of Pristina to start the process of transforming the "Kosovo Security Force" and the establishment of the so-called Ministry of Defence is yet another in a series of such acts, in addition to the imposition of discriminatory tariffs on goods from central Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and failure to implement what had been agreed in the Brussels Agreement. All of this is a continuation of the fait accompli policies by Pristina with tacit approval by a part of the international community including a significant number of NATO members despite their lip service to the contrary, which will not result in the change of irresponsible behaviour on the part of Pristina. Drawing artificial parallels in terms of responsibility, when it is perfectly clear who is responsible for the deadlock in the dialogue, will not jump-start the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

I would like to point out that to us it is of utmost importance to obtain the guarantees that the so-called "Kosovo Security Force" and other armed formations comprised of Albanians cannot enter the northern part of the Province without the approval of KFOR Commander. Unfortunately, these armed formations entered on several occasions the predominantly Serb-populated areas, an act that may potentially spiral out of control. That is why we expect KFOR, in line with its mandate, to act pre-emptively and prevent similar acts in the north of Kosovo and Metohija.

Distinguished participants of this meeting,

I would like to voice my hope that NATO and other partners should understand Serbia's priorities. Our cooperation has a future and a capacity to be additionally expanded in each individual area through partner relations, with the agreement of both sides, in the interest of reaching our common goals – above all, the security and stability of the region.

We have to work together to preserve peace, security and stability and achieve general prosperity. We can attain that goal only by strengthening cooperation and confidence as well as by our readiness and responsibility to translate words into action and reaffirm and implement all that had been agreed, without exception and conditioning.

I wish you all successful and fruitful discussions during this meeting.

Thank you for your attention."

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