



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia at the Annual Assembly of the Association of Italian Businessmen of the Confindustria of Serbia:

Dear Chairman Zaia,
Dear friend Patrizio
Cari Amici di Serbia ed Italia,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at the Annual Assembly of Confindustria of Serbia, an event that gathers the most important and most successful companies of Italy in our country.

May I take this opportunity to say a few words about our current bilateral relations. It is important to emphasize that our two countries have a long tradition of successful cooperation, which has been further enhanced over time and reaffirmed. Our relations are also reflected in the geographical and cultural closeness between our two peoples, the complementarity of economic structures and traditionally good business relations. Serbia has a large diaspora in Italy, which contributes to the economies of both countries and is another bridge of cooperation. I can say without reservation that Italy represents one of our greatest European friends.

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I wish to recall that, in 2009, Italy and Serbia signed the Strategic Partnership Declaration at the first joint session of the two governments, held in Rome. In view of the fact that Italy is Serbia's first-class political and economic partner, we intend to host the fourth joint session of the two Governments in Belgrade in the period ahead, which could also be accompanied by the Business Summit of the two countries. I would like to point to one significant given fact: regardless of the two Governments' agendas, the interest in maintaining and strengthening bilateral relations was and remained indisputable.

Frequent reciprocal high-level meetings between the two countries are yet another confirmation

of excellent ties existing between Serbia and Italy. Ambassadors Aleksic and Lo Caso are witnesses to virtually monthly Ministerial visits exchanged between the two countries. That speaks volumes of the intensity of our bilateral cooperation.

Last year, in March, we hosted, for the first time in our region, the President of the Council of Ministers, Mr. Giuseppe Conte. We deem the visit a very significant one. It also served as a confirmation that Italy will make further efforts in the coming period to support the process of European integration of Serbia and of other states in the region, which are yet to open their negotiations with the EU. We believe that, at this point in time, it is an encouragement, given our firm belief that EU enlargement must remain high on the agenda of the new European Commission.

Conte's second message was about Italy's unwavering interest in contributing to stability and good neighborly relations in our region. Improving good neighborly and mutually beneficial cooperation is one of Serbia's major foreign policy priorities. Serbia's efforts to be a constructive partner and to contribute, in a concrete way, to stability in the region have been recognized by our international partners. We stand ready to cooperate on a pragmatic basis, because only such a relationship enables the sustainable development of Serbia itself and ensures the prosperity of the region as a whole.

A third key message over which we have reached an agreement in the talks with the Italian Prime Minister was that the economic interests of Serbia and Italy coincide and are future-oriented. This means that apart from the fields where cooperation is traditionally maintained such as agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, defence, internal affairs, culture, new potential areas of cooperation have also been defined, areas which are extremely important for both countries, such as the environment and innovative technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Economic relations between Serbia and Italy can serve as an example of successful and consolidated cooperation. As you know, Italy is currently the second foreign trading partner of Serbia according to trade in goods and its second export market. Italy is among the largest investors in the Serbian economy – to date Italian companies have invested around EUR 3 billion in the Republic of Serbia, employing an average Serbian town of 26,000 inhabitants or workers.

An interest in and the announced inflow of new investments from Italy are very encouraging and indicate that Serbia has created a good business environment. Serbia is in 44th place on the World Bank Doing Business List and this position has been improving year on year. That was the result of great efforts made by the Government of Serbia and of comprehensive reforms undertaken in order to make the business environment favourable to businesses and our society better prepared to become part of contemporary social and economic developments. The fact that last year Serbia exported IT and digital services worth EUR 1.5 billion, showing that our economy is changing its structure, namely that it is turning from a commodity exporting country to a country with a GDP rising thanks to our young and talented people, i.e., our solid engineering base, has all contributed to it. The Republic of Serbia has adopted incentives to support investments by many Italian companies and it will continue to do so in the future.

The cooperation with Italy has been carried out at all levels and we are interested in deepening it further and developing it with the Italian regions. Agreement in the fields of economic, social and cultural development between Serbia and Veneto region, which was today signed by Prime Minister Ms. Ana Brnabic and President of Veneto region Mr. Luca Zaia, will ensure further development of cooperation in new areas such as tourism, youth and sport, contemporary creative work and creative industries. In addition, at the local level we have several Serbian and Italian twin towns, which represents a significant social and economic potential and provides an opportunity for getting our people to know each other better and to exchange local cultures.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that I am very pleased to be able to present today together with Mr. Patrizio dei Tos an award to ELEKTROREMONT company for socially responsible business operation. I also thank all participants of today's Assembly meeting and all Italian companies doing business in Serbia which have already assured themselves that Serbia is a country of good opportunities. I am sure that new opportunities lie ahead of us.

I would like to see representatives of new Italian companies at the next event of this type in Belgrade, companies that will, hopefully, thanks to your positive experiences and recommendations, come to Serbia in the meantime.

Thank you!

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