



Appearing on Happy TV's morning show, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic discussed the newly created situation in the world following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Serbian Foreign Minister highlighted that society was far more important than profit and that the greatest strength laid in manpower and social organization during crises.

The Minister first discussed his visit to China explaining the state of affairs there at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic - "I was given a mask. I could not move anywhere. I waited for my return flight to Serbia at the residence", Minister Dacic said.

Dacic underlined that great powers and international organizations, such as the UN and WHO, owed an explanation about the origin of the virus, whether it was natural or human-made, considering that the latter had serious implications.

"Assuming that the virus is lab-made, then we are all victims of biological warfare, and provided that its origin is natural, then it's an entirely different scenario", Dacic said and added that we reached the point where we could see a comeback of the previous system of values in which people were actually far more important than profit.

"Millionaires will die in the same manner as the poorest. When it comes to the 'life and death struggle', the wealthy are not privileged", stated the Minister and added that the crisis was probably the result of everything we did to the planet.

He noted that when such a crisis arose, the principles on which countries were evaluated no longer hold, such as whether a country was considered democratic or not, but rather many values, including those embodied in the EU were annulled, such as the freedom of movement, border shutdowns, return to national interests while only the common currency remained.

The following questions are crucial - "Will EU values make a comeback? What sort of actor will the EU be at that point? Will borders remain open?".

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic stated that there was a suspicion that a married couple from China who had previously been staying in Serbia brought the coronavirus back to Wuhan at the time when there was no indication of the coronavirus in Serbia and so the question one might ask concerned the location of the infected.

He said that the pandemic was in its initial phase and that the extent of its impact was to be seen adding that the coronavirus was the only one to receive such media coverage worldwide and was named 'infodemic'.

The Minister stated that China denied that the coronavirus had originated from Wuhan.

"Global panic reigns. We may be experiencing the impact of our actions on the planet. Every crisis poses a challenge and the advice is similar everywhere, there is no cure for the virus, out there a vaccine is being made as we speak. The impact will probably be significant, it is still unknown whether the virus is seasonal", the Minister said.

Minister Ivica Dacic noted that foreign policy ceased to exist, as the coronavirus was the sole topic of conversation.

First Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia said that the situation was problematic when people came from hotbeds of the epidemic.

"We have evacuated 5000 people, half of them were repatriated by airplane and the other half by bus. Not a single person abroad awaits evacuation to Serbia at an airport", Minister stated.

The Minister announced that additional evacuation flights were scheduled to Paris and Frankfurt the next day and to Washington on Wednesday.

Minister Dacic specified that 5000 Serbian citizens have returned so far – 2500 by plane and around 2500 by organized bus transport.

The Minister said that a flight will depart to Bratislava today as 320 people signed up to be repatriated, mainly those who have lost their job, not tourists.

On Thursday, a group of Serbian citizens are expected to arrive from Thailand to Belgrade via Bucharest, Dacic said on Happy TV.

"The evacuation flight to Bratislava is scheduled for today, flights to Paris and Frankfurt for tomorrow, and the flight to Washington the day after tomorrow", Dacic said.

He also stated that Air Serbia's intercontinental airplane operated daily as a cargo airplane to transport humanitarian aid and donations, including goods which Serbia purchased for treating COVID-19.

Dacic said that Serbia reached an agreement with the EU to be included in its repatriation operations under the Civil Protection Mechanism, which entailed bringing back Serbian citizens located in various parts of the world together with EU citizens. This was the manner in which, for instance, our citizens from Peru returned to Belgrade via Vienna.

Minister Dacic stated that Serbian citizens across the globe filed a request to return to Serbia and the following number of citizens reached out - Australia (144), Austria (308), Belgium (46), the United Kingdom (60), Greece (35), Egypt (25), Czech Republic (90), India (34), Indonesia (51), the Maldives (23), Thailand (80), Vietnam (15), Canada (34), Kuwait (43), Morocco (25), Nigeria (155), Germany (1500), Norway (107), Iceland (10), Portugal (35), the U.S. (around 700), Saudi Arabia (65), Slovakia (320), France (293), the UAE (177), Switzerland (496), Sweden (241), Albania (10) and Hungary (54).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs advised citizens wishing to return to get as close to Serbia as possible.

He highlighted that evacuation flights were approved by the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and added that the Government, together with the President, assisted our citizens in their repatriation emphasizing that the state was not obliged to do so and, in comparison to other countries, did not charge its citizens.

He underscored that realistic expectations need to be set and appealed once again to all citizens not to plan their return, unless necessary, until the crisis subdues.

Minister Ivica Dacic concluded that "Everyone is allowed to enter Serbia and this is a serious reminder to all of us to change our behavior. I appeal once again to all citizens to stay home".