



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic held a lecture today entitled "Serbia-U.S. Relations - Past, Present and Future", in the course of the Serbian-American Academy for Leaders.

The Academy is hosted via an online platform by the Serbian-American Friendship Congress, using this type of training, comprising a five-week course and a number of modules, to provide the participants with an opportunity to get acquainted with the U.S. political and legal system, the country's economy, society and history, but other important topics as well. The lectures will be held by distinguished experts in the above areas.

Read the full lecture by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic below:

Excellencies,  
Distinguished professors,  
Dear trainees,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to have the opportunity to take part again, together with Ambassador Godfrey, in an event devoted to Serbia-U.S. relations and their past, present and future, organized on this occasion by the Serbian-American Friendship Congress. Compelled by the COVID-19 pandemic to address you in this unconventional way, I wish to reiterate that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government of the Republic of Serbia welcome initiatives aimed at the promotion of mutual understanding, as a basis for the further strengthening of Serbia-U.S. bilateral relations. There is no doubt whatsoever that further promotion of Serbia-U.S. cooperation constitutes one of the most important priorities of our foreign policy.

The goal of today's lecture is to examine ways in which the historical context and experiences of our alliance in the past, from the establishment of diplomatic relations, through the Balkan Wars, World War I and II and the post-war period, could contribute to the understanding of the present moment and facilitate our exploration of the future path and directions to develop our

cooperation. It needs to be borne in mind that a certain disparity both geographically, demographically and also in terms of power has always characterized our relations with the United States. Regardless, Serbia and its people have proven possible that one not so large country can be considered an ally of the United States. Throughout history, the United States and Serbia have shared the same set of values while fighting side by side for the preservation of freedom-loving ideas and achievements of civilization. Be that as it may, the second half of the 20th century brought about huge challenges and deep divisions between us. For this very reason, we need to recall time and time again the positive examples from our shared history, in order to now set straight some erroneous perceptions we have created about each other.

Formally, the diplomatic relations between the Principality of Serbia and the United States were launched on 14 October 1881, by signing the Trade Treaty and Consular Convention which entered into force on 27 December 1882. However, the first recorded proposal to establish diplomatic relations dates back to the time of Prince Mihailo and the letter addressed in May 1867 by U.S. Consul to Romania, Louis J. Czapkay, to the Department of State, informing the U.S. side that Serbia too, like Wallachia and Moldavia, gained independence from the Ottoman Empire with its own Prince now in charge. It was proposed at the time that the United States should appoint a Consul General in Serbia, like Russia, France, Britain, Austria, Prussia and Italy had already done. However, the assassination of Prince Mihailo as well as the fact that Serbian independence had yet to become formal at the time were the reason that the establishment of consular relations did not materialize.

After the 1878 Congress of Berlin, U.S. Envoy in Vienna at the time John A. Kasson proposed that the United States establish relations with all countries which gained independence by the Treaty of Berlin, and our two countries signed the Trade Treaty and Consular Convention as a result. It is a kind of a curiosity that these treaties remained effective for over more than century as they were embraced by the Ministerial Council of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1919 and the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946, as successors.

The period from the 1880s through the first decade of the 20th century was characterized by the United States' restraint in relations with Serbia. The situation changed with the outbreak of Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, when the U.S. press wrote sympathetically about our country and its struggle for liberation. We must not lose sight of the fact that none other than Mihajlo Pupin had a pivotal role in creating the narrative of Serbia as a small, independent Balkan kingdom waging a freedom-loving struggle against an empire, drawing clear historical parallels with the American battle for independence. As a result, during the July crisis of 1914, American public and political circles supported Serbia and the position it maintained faced with Austro-Hungarian ultimatum and threat of war. The need for a fuller cooperation between the two countries culminated in the establishment of Serbian Royal Mission in Washington, D.C. in late 1916. When the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917 and granted a war loan to Serbia at the end of the year, the relations between the two states could now be characterized as a full-fledged war alliance.

Mission of the Serbian Government was on a visit to the United States from 20 December 2017 until mid-February the following year. The U.S. side insisted on referring to the mission as a

"Serbian" instead of "Yugoslav" one, given that President Woodrow Wilson had long advocated re-establishment of Serbia as an independent state and it being accorded access to the sea, a request later incorporated in his historic Fourteen Points of 1918. The extent of President Woodrow Wilson's sympathies for Serbia was made apparent in the 1918 telegram he addressed to the then Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia Nikola Pasic where he wrote that he was "sure that justice to Serbia stands at the very top of any programme of justice in the thoughts of every thinking and patriotic man in the United States."

The importance and scope of mutual respect is best illustrated by recalling probably the most moving occasion in Serbia-U.S. relations when on 28 July 1918 the Serbian flag flew over the White House and all U.S. public buildings. On this very day a statement of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was read out in the churches around the country and published in all major daily papers in which he, touched by their colossal losses and heroic acts, expressed his admiration of the "gallant people of Serbia" who had due to "their love of freedom", he said, "opposed a vastly superior enemy". The only flag of a foreign country ever flown over the White House other than the Serbian one, was the French flag to mark the 131st anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille in 1920. I often say how deeply honored I was to be able to take part in the observation of this anniversary of ours in 2018, both in Washington, D.C. in the U.S. Congress and here in Belgrade, recalling with our U.S. partners the alliance existing between our two peoples.

On the whole, the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Serbia during World War I can be characterized as one of alliance and friendship. In addition to humanitarian, political, financial and military assistance extended by our American friends, the Serbian and American peoples were also brought closer together. We must not forget that the United States was the first major power to accept and endorse the establishment of a Yugoslav state, recognizing the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as early as February 1919 and supporting our side in many ensuing border disputes, as yet another piece of legacy left by President Woodrow Wilson for us to remember him by.

In the interim between the World Wars, the United States' relations with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, i.e., the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which Serbia selflessly supported through sacrifice and by embedding its statehood, were characterized by a friendly cooperation, even though the United States, having withdrawn its delegation from the Versailles Peace Conference, and especially in the 1920s and 1930s took a more passive approach to foreign relations. This changed as the World War II broke out, and speaking about this period of our alliance, I would like to recall Operation Halyard also known as Operation Air Bridge as the most extensive mission of its kind in occupied Europe, rescuing around 500 U.S. airmen and staff from downed planes. This operation, as a kind of paradigm of our relations the best elements of which were often pushed to the background, was shrouded in secrecy for decades. Last September in Pranjani, we have finally observed the 75th anniversary since this operation in attendance of President Aleksandar Vucic, the then U.S. Ambassador to Serbia Kyle Scott and descendants of the rescued allied pilots.

The Yugoslav-U.S. relations in the post-World War II period can be divided into several periods and stages alternating between ideological clashes and periods dominated by pragmatic

cooperation. From 1945 to 1948, Yugoslavia adhered to principles of national development while pursuing a foreign policy in line with Informbiro and thus being perceived as "loyal member of the communist family centered in Moscow". The split between Stalin and Tito crucially changed the relations between the two states. In the ensuing several years, Yugoslavia became to the United States a focal point of efforts in support of its perseverance and becoming a symbol of differentiation behind the Iron Curtain. The United States in those years extended strong military, financial, material and political support to Yugoslavia. A number of historians hold the view that by signing the Balkan Pact of 1953, Yugoslavia had joined NATO or was on the threshold of being admitted into the membership of NATO, at the very least. Upon Stalin's death in 1953, pressures on Yugoslavia subdued, the process of normalization of relations with the USSR began and Josip Broz Tito embarked on the development of the Non-Aligned Movement, which would naturally only take him further apart from the United States.

Despite the cordial relationship between President Tito and President Kennedy, Yugoslav foreign policy from 1955-1968 largely focused on the institutionalization of the "Third Path", Non-Aligned Movement and the strengthening of cooperation with the USSR. With the outbreak of the Vietnam War, Yugoslav criticism of the U.S. foreign policy was on the rise. However, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and their suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, urged Serbia to focus again on the strengthening of ties with the United States, fearful of facing a similar destiny.

The period between 1971 and the passing of Josip Broz Tito in 1980 was characterized by the rising trend in the relations between the two countries, especially after the end of the Vietnam War and the Yugoslav side's efforts to "play down" the radical tendencies within the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1978, Josip Broz Tito visited the United States for the third time during his stay in power. In this period in particular, Yugoslavia enjoyed a kind of a privileged position amid the Cold War division between the two opposing military and political alliances, and it can be said that it managed to capitalize on this amply, engaging skillfully in a balancing act.

After Tito's death, the Yugoslav political elite failed to grasp the developments that were heralded by the successive economic and financial crises. In a situation where separatism was revived and the impact of U.S. foreign policy change brought about by the Reagan administration was underestimated, U.S.-Yugoslav relations in the 1980s depended largely on changes in Cold War conflicts and on the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

The last decade of the 20th century also brought about the most difficult period in Serbia-U.S. relations, culminating in the severance of diplomatic relations on 25 March 1999 due to the armed conflict between NATO and the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This was undoubtedly the lowest point in almost 140 years of Serbian-American history. The events of the 1990s, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and especially the 1999 bombing, produced a series of negative perceptions that were often reflected in both the way we think and the quality of our relations after being reestablished in November 2000. The most drastic example of this is the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and Metohija, which is the issue on which Serbia and the U.S. still have fundamentally different positions. Serbia-U.S. political relations in the post-Cold War period can be summed up in the well-known diplomatic phrase "we agree to

disagree."

However, Serbia's determination to tackle outstanding issues in a diplomatic and constructive manner, taking into account broader stability, has led to the fact that today I can state with satisfaction that the cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and the United States, despite its challenges, has a positive dynamic. In recent years, political dialogue has been intensified at all levels and in numerous fields, which has contributed to the creation of a stable basis for the development of overall bilateral relations. Intensification of top-level political dialogue and an open invitation to President Donald Trump to visit Serbia remain a topic our U.S. partners are always reminded of, especially given that Jimmy Carter was the last U.S. President to visit Belgrade back in June 1980.

As regards the current Serbia-U.S. relations, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is certainly an important topic of our political dialogue. Despite diverging positions, we remain fully open to further discussions to resolve this issue. I reiterate that our side will make utmost effort to clarify and bring our positions closer to the U.S. partners, while expecting that the U.S. will respect Serbian interests as well. We see the U.S. as a key partner in the process of achieving a lasting and sustainable solution, acceptable to both parties. Another evidence of the attention paid by the U.S. administration to this issue is the fact that the U.S. has appointed two special envoys, Ambassador Richard Grenell as a White House Envoy for Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Palmer as State Department Envoy for our region.

Serbia particularly appreciates the support that the United States is continuously providing to us in the pursuit of full membership of the European Union, as our strategic goal. Maintaining a positive dynamic in the European integration process is crucial to the stability and development of Serbia and the entire region. I hope that the United States will continue to actively support our country in achieving this goal, regardless of the challenges that the European Union itself is currently facing. Strengthening of mutual relations is supported by the fact that through its contribution and especially its participation in peacekeeping missions Serbia affirms and promotes peace and security in the region and is an exporter of stability not only in the Western Balkans, but beyond. We are grateful for the understanding and support provided by the United States to deeper integration of the region, as exemplified by initiatives such as "mini-Schengen", which should help achieve the goals aimed at the well-being of the entire Western Balkans.

The Republic of Serbia stands ready to further strengthen bilateral relations in all areas that can give additional quality and content to our cooperation. I would like to emphasize here primarily the desire of the Republic of Serbia to continue to work intensively on strengthening economic ties and attracting investments from the USA after the end of the ongoing crisis. Although trade with the U.S. has been increasing in recent years, we will certainly continue to work on this issue in the future, especially given that the U.S. is not yet among the top 10 trading partners of Serbia. The first two months of this year, before the pandemic was declared, began with a solid trade amounting to USD 190.4 million (exports from Serbia amounted to 49.88 and imports to USD 140.52 million). In the course of 2019, total commodity trade amounted to approximately USD 854 million.

Areas such as information technology, energy and mining, agriculture, but also other forms of

cooperation, such as town twinning, university cooperation, tourism, connecting small and medium-sized enterprises, chambers of commerce, etc. are yet a clear evidence of our efforts to strengthen our relations, both politically and economically, and through the empowerment of scientific, cultural and all other ties that will make our states and nations closer to one another.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My review of the Serbia-U.S. relations in the past, present and in the future would not be complete without mentioning the Serbian diaspora in the USA. Our people went to the United States cyclically, in multiple "waves", from the first half of the 19th century to the present. As a result, in addition to "recognizable" parts of the U.S. for their broad Serbian communities such as Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New York, communities in Florida and California are increasing in number and smaller Serbian communities are scattered throughout the U.S. (e.g., even in Alaska, Montana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, etc.).

According to U.S. 2013 data, 189,671 Americans of Serbian descent were registered, while at the same time, U.S. institutions themselves estimate this number to be significantly higher. Estimates of Serbian associations in the U.S. range from 600,000 to 1,000,000 members of the Serbian community. As diverse as these figures may be, the Serbian diaspora, in whose ranks not only Tesla and Pupin lived and worked, but also people like George Fisher (Djordje Sagic), who more than 200 years ago moved to America as a Serbian revolutionary and participated in the "Texas Revolution," Karl Malden, Pete Maravic, George Vojnovic, Helen Delic Bentley, Peter Bogdanovic, Steve Tesic and many others who have left, or still leave a significant mark in the United States, together make up one of the important ties and added value in building our future relationship.

In conclusion, I would like voice optimism about the future of Serbia-U.S. relations. I think that almost 140 years of diplomatic relations teaches us that, historically, at similar, watershed moments, Serbia and the United States have been together on the right side of history - sharing the same ideals and values.

This current state of affairs is a good basis for an optimistic view into the future, despite the fact that we are all amidst global crisis caused by the current COVID-19 pandemic, which inevitably affects the health of our people first and foremost and the world economy. At this difficult time for all of us, the Republic of Serbia and the United States are standing together in the fight against an invisible enemy, taking a toll on human lives. I would like to point out that we have already organized repatriation flights that have brought hundreds of American and Serbian citizens back to their countries. Just a few days ago, the first part of U.S. assistance arrived in Belgrade in the form of 6,000 corona virus test kits, which only shows that despite all the difficulties it faces, the American people do not forget to be in solidarity with their Serbian friends.

This is not surprising, especially if we recall that in early 1915 an American medical mission led by Dr. Edward Ryan was engaged in the fight against the typhus epidemic in Serbia. In a heroic battle that was fought at the time, three U.S. physicians and nine nurses fell ill with this vicious disease, and one physician died. Such solidarity of the United States, also demonstrated in the

past, shows that Serbs and Americans can be and have been allies throughout history, especially in times of great crises. All this gives hope that, despite all the challenges we face, there is a mutual desire to preserve and strengthen our relations in the future as well, based on common interests, mutual understanding and respect.

Thank you.