



In a statement for TV Prva, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic said that the emergency situation caused by the pandemic also led to major changes in foreign policy.

"Today's foreign policy has been largely reduced to combating coronavirus and any other activity is basically non-existent. These days, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has two key activities. In addition to assistance in repatriating our nationals, we have also been helping the national healthcare institutions, that is, state authorities in acquiring all necessary flight permits for the delivery of equipment being purchased worldwide", Dacic said.

"In a month or less, we have managed to transfer and repatriate over 5000 people. These were not tourists as we, in the first place, endeavoured to help people who happened to be abroad, stranded at airports, students losing their status, but also persons on business trips, and tourists on condition that they were stuck at airports or destinations they had to leave. A half of them arrived on Air Serbia planes and others used cars or buses arranged by us, meaning that we gave guarantees enabling them to pass border crossings.

The current situation is such that one could not be sold a ticket without prior guarantees of the Ministry that it would transfer this person and allow their entry to Serbia."

Minister Dacic said that our compatriots can be found all over the world, referring to persons who had contacted Serbian diplomatic missions and consular posts requesting return. Most of them applied in Germany - 1549, the United States - 639 and Austria - 478. Serbian citizens were also located in Malta, Ethiopia, Uruguay, Nigeria and Maldives - virtually all corners of the world.

The Minister stressed that flights arranged in coordination with the President would take off once a day.

"A flight to Dubai is scheduled for tomorrow picking up people who arrived there to be transferred to Belgrade. Next week, Malta follows on Monday, Bratislava and Prague on Tuesday, Stockholm and Oslo on Wednesday, Paris on Thursday and, finally, Berlin and

Frankfurt on Friday. Also, a return of our nationals from Saudi Arabia that they arranged is expected on Monday. It is our goal to have people from Italy arrive home by car if possible, as well as from Slovenia, of course", the Serbian Foreign Minister said.

"All these people need to take note of this important message. We are not able to organize a flight to Philippines, but what we can do instead is reach destinations in Europe, Abu Dhabi, Doha or Istanbul. For everything within this framework we can provide assistance, issuing guarantees to our nationals that their country will repatriate them, but they need to make arrangements, whether with facilitation of our embassies or on their own in countries with no diplomatic presence of Serbia, and arrive to destinations closer to Serbia. All of them who took our advice eventually arrived in Belgrade", the Minister informed the Serbian citizens abroad.

Discussing the initiative launched by the Western Balkan countries requesting that the European Commission exempt them from bans on medical equipment and medicament exports from the EU during the coronavirus pandemic, the Minister said that the EU's response was expected next week.

"We were informed that they would consider the appeal and give a response next week. The key issue today is not whether a country can afford to make a purchase, but if a supplier is willing to sell the goods and actually deliver them once you have made a payment", Dacic said.

"We are not brought up in any of these discussions, neither Serbia nor any of candidate countries and countries being told to have a European perspective", Dacic assessed, adding that even though they decided to reallocate the IPA funds for the region, the EU had yet to make a joint decision on the aid package for the countries within the Union.

"This is why we have resorted to our own capacities, endeavoring to support the economy by Government intervention", the Minister said.

"In conclusion, there are lessons to be learned out of this, applicable to our everyday lives", Minister Dacic said in a statement for TV Prva.