



Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Nikola Selakovic stated today that Patriarch Irinej was a wise and peace-loving man, a man of vision who understood the power of national unity and was very close to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic with whom he had special relationship.

Selakovic said that the Patriarch's departure was a difficult moment and sad news for Serbia and Serbian people wherever they lived, since he was an outstanding person graced with many qualities rare in the present day world, including modesty.

By way of illustration, he described a telephone conversation between President Vucic and the Patriarch during his treatment in a hospital in Karaburma.

"He said, Mr. President, now I understand you, when I see these magnificent nurses, all hard-working and committed doctors and the equipment you purchased, how valuable and expensive a day in a hospital is now that I am here, as they said I should although I feel good and I am taking someone else's place who may be needing it more," Selakovic said in a program on TV Pink.

He recalled that Patriarch Irinej became a leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church at a difficult time, just two years after the separatists in Kosovo and Metohija proclaimed independence and we a lost battle in the International Court of Justice, saying that he was a man who understood full well the precarious situation of the Serbian people.

"It was time and God that sent President Vucic not only a serious collocutor but a fellow fighter striving for better Serbia and Serbhood. I was able to see first- hand, when I was Secretary General in the Office of the President, this great closeness and special relationship. This is not

just my impression, the closest associates of the Patriarch could confirm that", Selakovic said.

Referring to the Patriarch as a man of vision, Selakovic recalled that for 34 years he was at the helm of the Eparchy of Nis, spending more than half of his service during communist rule.

"He knew what it looked like when the State and the church were at odds. He knew how wrong it was for the Serbian people", Selakovic said adding that Patriarch Irinej's legacy was more than 80 new or restored churches since he came to Belgrade.