



Serbia wants to become an EU member and we are aware of our obligations on that path. However, we must look after our state interests, said today First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic.

In response to some European officials calling on Serbia to align its policy over the crisis in Ukraine with that of the Union, he said on RTS that Serbia observed EU rules but that it would not impose measures against Russia, our traditional friend.

"As we move closer to the EU, we are going to have a greater obligation to align ourselves with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the Union. However, at this state Serbia must, on the one hand, respect its commitment to the EU and, on the other, weigh its state and national interests on each specific issue", said the Serbian Minister.

He added that Serbia had very clearly stated its position on the matter.

"We respect the territorial integrity of all Member States of the United Nations but, on the other hand, Serbia cannot and will not institute any sanctions against Russia, our traditional friend", Dacic said and reiterated that this position was principled.

He wondered why Serbia would do something that would make her ahead of some other European countries.

"Last night I read that some Western countries continue their arms sales to Russia", indicated Dacic adding that: "When we have a meeting with China, this is interpreted by applying double standards, and when they take entire delegations there and make a deal of a century with China, that is quite normal."

"We know our obligations, but we have learnt from experience that we must also look after our own interests. It would have been much easier for us had we heard these words when Kosovo had taken illegal steps against Serbia. Double standards produce and create precedents having harmful effects", Dacic remarked.

Dacic denied allegations that Serbia's position on Ukraine undermined its negotiating process

with the Union.

Commenting on the negotiations with the EU, he recalled that the dynamic was not disrupted by the Serbian elections. Therefore, he did not believe that the dynamic would be disrupted by the holding of elections in Kosovo and the EU, either.

"Our dynamic is such that we want and are ready to open new chapters", Dacic said.

He stated that he received assurances from the Greek Foreign Minister and the current President of the Council of the EU, Mr Evangelos Venizelos, that Greece would do its utmost to convene the second Inter-Governmental Conference in June but that it would only be meaningful, if a chapter were opened.

He added that it was most likely that the second IGC would be held in October under the Italian Presidency of the EU.

"Objectively speaking, we will not be able to open Chapters 23 and 24 before the New Year. There are many problems as far as Chapter 35 is concerned because answers should be given to specific issues that have not yet been implemented since some countries make it conditional on the implementation of agreements reached so far. We would be interested in opening Chapter 32 as soon as possible. That chapter is about financial control where we have made significant progress, and we also expect to be able to open Chapter 35, i.e. the chapter on Kosovo, as well", Dacic recognized.

Our purpose is a professional, modern and strong diplomacy

Dacic said that in the coming period priority would be accorded to a professional, modern and strong diplomacy that would be able to help the country to exercise the greatest possible international influence.

The Ambassadors who had fallen short of our expectations would be recalled and would fill in the vacant posts, Dacic said.

"I want our diplomats to help us exert the greatest possible influence in the world. Also, to help us get to decision-makers in foreign countries. That would be our goal in the period ahead – a professional, modern and strong diplomacy capable of helping our country", Dacic indicated.

In his words, from 2009 to date more than 3,000 diplomatic passports have been issued. Most of them have been issued regularly, although there have been instances of their abuse.

He said that this practice would be reversed, pointing out that all irregularities and abuses would be looked into and rectified.

The Minister stated that last year, around 25,000 cables circulated within and outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and one them said that Burundi sent a contingent of its troops to a peace support mission in another African country.

"Of what concern is it to Serbian diplomacy or state?", Dacic wondered saying that to be an Ambassador was not a reward to someone, but that a diplomat should help his/her state to be as influential in international relations as possible, meaning that he/she should get to policy and decision makers in their countries of accreditation whose decisions would matter to Serbia.

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Source: RTS