



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic hosted today, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the New Year's reception for heads of diplomatic missions and international organizations, as well as media directors and editors-in-chief.

Following is full text of the address delivered by Minister Dacic on the occasion:

"Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I welcome you, first of all, and wish you a happy and prosperous New Year 2017.

The past year abounded in challenges, but I venture to say that these challenges were successfully overcome, enabling us to start the New Year with plenty of new experiences and a greater amount of strength and capacity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was fully engaged in the implementation of the foreign policy objectives of the Republic of Serbia.

We have opened four new negotiating chapters with the European Union, demonstrating in action our true commitment to Serbia's major foreign policy objective – that of its full membership of the European Union. I believe we have reasons to expect further intensification of the process of Serbia's EU accession, enabling us to open, in 2017, more negotiating chapters than in the previous year.

At the same time, we have established a high level of cooperation with other international partners important to us, including the Russian Federation, the United States, China, practically all EU Member States, our neighbouring countries, as well as the countries of the African Union, Non-Aligned Movement, and many other states and organizations worldwide.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I had 131 meetings with international dignitaries, 37 of which were held at home, and 94 abroad. In addition to bilateral visits, I also wish to single out our participation in international meetings, such as the Summit of Non-Aligned Countries in Venezuela, the 15th Francophonie Summit in Madagascar, China - CEEC Summit in Riga, the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, and the Bled Strategic Forum.

In the context of regional cooperation, I would like to underline, in particular, the contribution of the Republic of Serbia to the initiation and implementation of specific projects and activities within the "Berlin Process" - a pragmatic political framework for supporting the Western Balkans.

The Republic of Serbia has devoted special attention to the preservation of regional stability and alleviation of the effects of the migration crisis. This was achieved through dialogue with all relevant partners, as well as on the multilateral level, where I would like to draw attention to our activity in the framework of the Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), the Chairmanship-in-Office of which we assumed for a period of one year from June 2016 to June 2017. Preservation of regional stability, and the migrant crisis are among the challenges that we are facing and will, unfortunately, have to continue to deal with in the current year.

May I also recall that the Republic of Serbia chaired the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in the second half of 2016, and hosted the participants of the 35th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization in Belgrade on 13 December 2016.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia will continue its efforts aimed at the preservation of the country's territorial integrity. As you know, we have never avoided nor will we ever avoid engaging in dialogue with anyone side, including with representatives of Pristina. We have demonstrated, on several occasions, our goodwill and readiness to deliver on our dialogue-based commitments. We therefore expect the opposite side to demonstrate an equal amount of commitment and readiness, which, regrettably, was not the case in practice. There is no doubt that failure to fulfil previous agreements, along with unilateral actions, hate-speech and show of force are incompatible with the achievement of progress, just as much as the threats currently being posed to the security of diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Republic of Serbia in foreign countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, and as reports of relevant international financial institutions have clearly shown, the Republic of Serbia has had a remarkable economic and financial performance, according to all parameters. A developed and prosperous Serbia is the country to which the Government, headed by Prime Minister Vucic, aspire and all the people of Serbia wish for. Its progress and stability contribute to the development of the entire region; therefore, only such Serbia can be, and is, a partner recognized and respected in the world at large.

In this context, I wish to underline that one of the priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the coming period will be to put in place a legal framework and an appropriate structure for economic diplomacy. Our goal is to create a network, not necessarily a broad one, at least for

the time being, but an effective one, suited to the requirements of our time, and based on the best experiences of other European and world diplomacies.

Dear friends,

Thank you for your attention, and let me wish you, once again, all the happiness and success on the personal and professional levels."