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Interview with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic

Interviewed by Violeta Cvejic

Good relations with Montenegro - Serbia's priority

Montenegro and Serbia are countries with a long, positive common history, and I hope that they will have a common positive future in the EU and all the other organizations whose membership we aspire to, said Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic

Belgrade, 3 July 2007 – With Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic we discussed the past and the future relations between Serbia and Montenegro, as well as some other current issues.

You are the first Foreign Minister of Serbia to visit Montenegro since Serbia and Montenegro became independent states. What messages would you like to put across?

- The first foreign policy priority of the Government of Serbia is to stabilize the situation in the region, strengthen good-neighbourly relations and ease tensions in every respect. Our strategic priority which is, I believe, also the strategic priority of all other countries in the region, is full integration into the European Union. The first prerequisite of that is stability, which would enable all the countries in the region to embark upon the reform processes that are necessary to meet the Copenhagen criteria. Serbia's priority are goodneighbourly relations and regional stability – and that will be my main message. As regards the relations with Montenegro specifically, our two countries have shared a long positive common history and I am hopeful that we will share a common future in the EU, and all other organizations to whose membership we aspire.

What, in your opinion, have been negative aspects of the Serbia – Montenegro relations thus far and what will you do to reverse that?

- We have experienced a turbulent process in the institutional sense and I understand that the emotions of many are still running high. However, on my visit to Montenegro I wish to draw attention to what is good and what we will continue to build upon. Our two countries were the first in the Balkans to go their separate ways peacefully and democratically, thus, I believe, making a precedent in the recent history of the Balkans. The Government of Serbia, on its part, will make its best efforts to maintain good relations with Montenegro in the future.

Does that mean that you are bringing along only positive energies?

- I understand emotions. They have led us to the problems that we are facing today. It would be dishonest of me to ignore them, but I wish to focus primarily on what is positive.

Serbia does not have an embassy building or a single diplomat in Montenegro. Is that a reflection of the attitude of the Serbian authorities towards their neighbour or of the negative relationship within the ruling coalition parties, due to which the leading parties in it could not agree on what should be done first?

- In the past year, Serbia changed its constitution, held the elections and had several months of negotiations before its government was installed. That has taken a lot of time, and that is the real reason.

According to all the Serbian Government representatives, independent Kosovo is out of the question, but there are no comments on what will happen in Serbia and how its Government will react if Kosovo, nevertheless, somehow becomes independent.

- Serbia, as a sovereign democratic state will never agree to relinquish any part of its territory. I do not think that Montenegro or any other state would accept it. We expect the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act to be respected by all, and neighbouring countries and other countries in the region to show special sensitivity to this issue. Acts of unilateral

recognition would cause instability that would affect the entire region.

Does that mean there is no plan B?

- Giving up sovereignty and territorial integrity is out of the question.

What will happen if the United Nation adopts a resolution enabling independence for Kosovo?

- We do not expect the UN to adopt such a decision through any of its bodies, taking into account the basic postulates of that organization.

We constantly hear messages coming from senior US officials that Kosovo will be independent. How much do such positions jeopardize relations between the US and Serbia and what attitude will Serbia adopt towards the countries backing Kosovo's independence?

- We expect all the UN member states to abide by the rules of the United Nations. However, if any country takes unilateral action in violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia, we will have no other choice but to re-examine our relations with those countries. On the other hand, Serbia should not bring itself into a situation of isolation as it did in the nineties.

In which direction will the relations be re-examined?

- We will analyze all the options available in the current diplomatic practice and the Government of Serbia will choose appropriate measures.

Which attitude do you expect Montenegro to take in respect of the resolution of the

Kosovo issue?

- To abide by the norms and rules of the United Nations, and in this particular case – to respect the territorial integrity of Serbia.

The Serbian political leadership says that there is readiness to arrest and hand over all persons indicted by ICTY for war crimes. However, are the operatives capable of doing the job and when do you expect completion of cooperation with ICTY?

- Such readiness is not only of a declaratory nature, because specific results have already been achieved. One of them is resumption of the SAA negotiations. I cannot give any dates regarding the completion of cooperation with ICTY, but I believe that it will be sometime soon.

Who do you consult with regard to the adoption of major decisions, the Prime Minister or the President of Serbia, and with whom of the two do you have better cooperation, because the Democratic Party, which nominated you, and the Prime Minister's Democratic Party of Serbia occasionally express differences of opinion and engage in sharp polemic discussions?

- The Government conducts the state's foreign policy, which is represented abroad by the President. In the framework of the competences emanating from the Constitution, I consult both the President and the Prime Minister.

But with whom do you cooperate better?

- I have known the President of Serbia longer and have cooperated with him for a longer period of time. Institutionally, however, I cooperate equally with both of them.

Envoy to Montenegro

Mrs. Radmila Hrustanovic has denied media speculation that she will be Serbia's first ambassador to Montenegro. Have the DS and the DSS agreed on who will be Serbia's ambassador to Montenegro?

- We are currently in the process of reaching agreement on envoys for a number of diplomatic missions and selecting people who could best represent us in those countries. Particular attention is being devoted to Montenegro, because we wish to send to Podgorica the best among the best. This decision has not yet been taken.

Do you know from which party will be the ambassador to Montenegro?

- Party membership is not relevant. What matters is who will be the best to do the job.

No meetings with parties

During your visit to Montenegro, will you meet with the representatives of the Serbian parties? They still entertain various expectations from Serbia.

- I will not be having meetings with parties. I will meet only with the officials of Montenegro.

Have you been contacted by anyone from the Serbian parties in Montenegro?

- The answer is no.