

Statement

by

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic

on the occasion of the New Year's reception

13 January 2020

Excellencies,

Esteemed Media Representatives,

Dear friends,

I am glad that we have gathered here again on the occasion of the New Year's reception, which has already become a kind of a tradition in our Ministry when we socialize on the eve of what is referred to as Orthodox or Serbian New Year. I am pleased that you have responded to my invitation and that I can tell that you are fresh and ready to step into the new 2020, inclined to work and cooperate ever better. As in the past, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and myself will keep the door open for talks and cooperation with all of you in 2020, and I am convinced that we will have an even better and more meaningful year in this regard.

Let me briefly remind you of the most important activities that have marked our work over the past year and to announce in a few words our plans and expectations for the year ahead.

The national priority of the Republic of Serbia in the past year, and in the year ahead, is certainly the fight for the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity. In pursuit of this complex task and our constitutional obligation, foreign policy activities occupy the highest place, which is why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, our

diplomatic service, my associates and myself still have activities related to the process concerning Kosovo and Metohija as a priority on our agenda. Despite our maximum commitment and constructiveness, we are not satisfied with the progress made last year in that regard, because genuine dialogue was lacking, owing to Pristina's refusal to cancel the decision to impose tariffs on goods originating from central Serbia. It is incomprehensible that this anti-civilizational measure has persisted for more than a year, despite demands from all over the world for it to be lifted. We hope that this will change this year, that the tariffs will be revoked as soon as possible, in order to resume the dialogue that Serbia is interested in and sees in it the only way to reach a compromise and long-term solution.

Throughout 2019, Serbia has shown that it is a responsible and constructive partner in this process. Our arguments and our principled position played a crucial role in five more UN member states revoking, over the past year, their earlier decisions to recognize Kosovo. These are the Republic of Palau, the Republic of Togo, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Ghana and the Republic of Nauru, to which I once again extend gratitude. Consequently, a total of 17 states have withdrawn their earlier decisions, and the situation now is such that the number of the UN member states not recognizing Kosovo as a state is larger than the number of states which do recognize it. Such a constellation in the international community became even more apparent when Pristina made a new attempt at bidding for Interpol membership, in Chile, in October, when it ended up withdrawing its candidacy in the face of even more opponents of that membership.

The Republic of Serbia is ready to continue the dialogue on Kosovo and Metohija, and in that sense we are working hard with all international partners to return as soon as possible to a process that will provide a compromise and long-term solution for Kosovo and Metohija. I hope that in the course of this year we will be able to resume the dialogue and make up for the time lost. But I repeat, Serbia is not the sole player in this process which does not only depend on us and our clear willingness to talk.

European integration and full EU membership of the Republic of Serbia remain key foreign policy priorities as does the implementation of the reform process in accordance with the highest standards set before it. The European Union institutions were formed during 2019, and it is extremely positive that the new Commission still has the Enlargement Commissioner post. Serbia expresses its full support for Oliver Varhelyi hoping that he will, together with the EU Member States, succeed in facilitating an accelerated pace of the accession process. At the same time, we welcome the appointment of EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell.

Efforts to reform and adapt the EU to the needs of today, as well as the challenges faced by EU Member States, have led to the dynamics of the accession process unfolding at an insufficient pace. However, the reform processes that are being undertaken in Serbia have been recognized and two negotiation chapters have been opened in 2019, which means that our country has by now opened more than a half of the negotiation chapters required (18 out of 35), and it has now undoubtedly embarked on the EU membership path.

Concrete activities that have a significant impact on the citizens of Serbia include the signing of the Agreement on reducing roaming costs in the region, which opens the possibility for better communication and certainly a more economically viable network, with the tendency to apply this approach to EU Member States.

After intensive efforts made by the Republic of Serbia, the Transport Community Secretariat, with its seat in Belgrade, was opened last year. I would also like to remind you that on 1 June 2019, Serbia took over the chairmanship of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and the EU macro-regional Strategy for the region.

Croatia has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the EU these days, and we expect it, as a country from our region and the most recently acceded member state, to make a special contribution to the enlargement policy. The EU-Western Balkans summit, scheduled for May in Zagreb, should record a concrete result and by then the methodology for the accession process needs to be made completely clear. For the

states which have already made considerable progress in the integration process and opened more than a half of the negotiating chapters, like Serbia, the dynamic of the process needs to be promoted by offering a clear political support.

In the second half of 2020, we expect significant results from Germany as the strongest EU economy and an important EU Member State with a capacity to generate decisions of high importance. It is necessary that the enlargement policy be placed high on the agenda and that the activities of either side, both the EU and Serbia, be oriented towards securing a faster pace of the ongoing processes, aiming for concrete and tangible results in favour of the population.

Taking into account the importance that the strengthening of relations in our region has for the European integration process, I can conclude that, in the last year, a high level of political and economic relations was maintained with the majority of neighbouring and countries of the South-East Europe. Serbia held joint Government sessions with Hungary and Slovenia, while also attaching particular importance to the holding of the 3rd session of the High Cooperation Council of Serbia and Greece and the signing of a Joint Declaration establishing a strategic partnership between the two countries. Furthermore, Serbia initiated the idea of establishing a regional zone of free movement of people, goods, services and capital (commonly referred to as “mini-Schengen”) that will indubitably have a positive effect on the relations in the region. In this way, Serbia has again proven to be an active, reliable and credible partner in the region and beyond.

As for bilateral cooperation, we can be more than pleased with the previous year, given that 21 Foreign Ministers from the whole world visited Serbia, while I paid visits to as many as 33 countries on bilateral or working visits. It is our endeavour to continue to promote in 2020, too, the relations with countries of the region as well as with the key foreign policy partners and traditional friends of the Republic of Serbia (in the first place the EU Member States, Russian Federation, China, the United States of America), but to engage with the same intensity to further develop cooperation and relations with states from the world at large.

In this context, I wish to underline the importance of last year's visit by French President Emmanuel Macron, which was the first visit to Serbia by a President of France in 18 years, on which occasion as many as 25 agreements were signed, thus creating a firm foundation for the further solidification of the two countries' bilateral relations. I would also like to point out the meeting between President Aleksandar Vucic and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin held in Belgrade on 17 January as well as in Sochi on 4 December, reaffirming the exceptionally high level of political and economic relations between the two countries. The last year was also marked by the signing of a Free Trade Agreement between Serbia and the Eurasian Economic Union, which opened a market with a population of 185 million for Serbian products and an opportunity to further deepen relations with countries of Eurasia.

A continuity was maintained in the deepening of the comprehensive strategic partnership with PR China, in which context I point out the participation of President Vucic at the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, as well as Prime Minister Ana Brnabic taking part in the Eighth Summit of heads of government of China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) held in Dubrovnik in April last year. In the context of strengthening Serbia's relations with its Asian partners, I point out the visit to Serbia made by External Affairs Minister of India Mr. Jaishankar in November, the first realized at this level in more than three decades, while the August visit by then MFA of Japan Taro Kono was the first visit from this country to Serbia at this level in 18 years. In 2019, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Korea observed the 30th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations, and the Foreign Minister of R. Korea Mrs Kang Kyung-wha was on a visit to Serbia in early June. Serbia focused special attention in 2019 to fostering relationships with countries we have yet to establish diplomatic relations with, as one of our goals is to have diplomatic relations with all of the UN member states.

In the bilateral arena, we have made progress in the relations with the United States of America. The U.S. side repeatedly conveyed its support to lifting the tariffs and continuing the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. With a view to substantively improving

the bilateral cooperation the focus will be on the strengthening of its economic aspect, carrying out high- and top-level visits, while securing further support to the European integration process and the ongoing efforts being made by Serbia towards regional peace and stability. We continued to intensify political dialogue and promote cooperation with countries of **Latin America and the Caribbean** by exchanging visits and attendance of Serbian officials at the regional events held there.

Serbia continued to re-launch relationships with its old friends from Africa and the Middle East. An increased exchange of high-level visits and numerous meetings with Foreign Ministers representing the states of Africa and the Middle East held on the fringes of international events demonstrated a readiness to expand and add new quality to the relations with these countries. Serbia will continue to support and actively contribute to the peaceful resolution of disputes in Africa and the Middle East, primarily by participating in peacekeeping missions it is part of (in Lebanon, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Somalia and Mali).

When it comes to the efforts to expand our diplomatic and consular network, I would like to draw your attention to the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Armenia, in December, as well as of Honorary Consulates in Edirne – Turkey, Nice – France, the Peruvian capital city Lima, Pitești – Romania, but also the Consular Office in Drvar in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ministry launched the procedure to open a consular office headed by an honorary consular officer in Georgia, with a seat in Tbilisi. Furthermore, in July 2019, a decision was formally adopted to open a Culture and Information Centre of the Republic of Serbia in London. The implementation of this decision has been underway, and it is our expectation that the Centre will open its doors in the first half of 2020, as soon as adaptation works on its premises are completed. We are also glad that the Embassies of Kazakhstan and the Kingdom of Cambodia opened in Belgrade, while also welcoming the opening of a Belgrade Diplomatic Office of the Embassy of Georgia in Athens and of the Consulate of Georgia in R. Serbia.

In 2019, Serbia showed no less effort at the multilateral level, too, where we worked intensively to protect our interests in international forums and to make a contribution on the part of our country to the activities of international organizations. The state delegation, headed by President Vucic, had a notable appearance at the General Debate of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in New York, and other high-level meetings held under UN auspices. On that occasion a large number of meetings was held with high officials of the UN member states, including with the Organization's highest officials on which occasion the Serbian delegation presented the country's key national priorities.

As I have already briefly mentioned, we continued our active engagement in preventing the admission of the so-called "Kosovo" to various international organizations, which remains one of the priorities in the period ahead as well. We have successfully prevented the so-called "Kosovo" from becoming a member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the Intra-European Organisation of Tax Administrations (IOTA). The solidified international position of Serbia was affirmed as was the commitment of a large number of states to observe the rules of international law and the principles the international order is based on. In November last year, at the 40th Session of UNESCO General Conference in Paris, Serbia was re-elected to UNESCO Executive Board for the period until 2023. By taking an active approach and a constructive role through its engagement so far as Executive Board member our country made a significant contribution to the overall activity of UNESCO.

As regards the upcoming activities, I would like to underline in particular the participation of Serbian delegation at the sessions of the United Nations Security Council to be held in April and October 2020 to discuss the regular reports on the work of UNMIK.

In the field of security policy, it is my pleasure to note that Serbia has continued to visibly contribute to global, European and regional security with its involvement in EU- and UN-mandated missions and operations, and through its commitment to the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union. Serbia currently

participates in four EU missions and five UN missions and operations with 284 security personnel and participation of women amounting to 13%. According to the UN list (UN mission contributions), Serbia ranks 49th out of 122 countries, that is 9th in Europe and 1st in the region of South-East Europe. In terms of contributions in relation to population size, our country is the 3rd contributor in Europe.

Partnership with NATO is an extremely important aspect of Serbia's state policy, as well as of its efforts to create a permanently stable region. Despite the difficult legacy of relations with the Alliance, embodied in the illegal bombing of our country in 1999, we continually strive to enhance relations with this military alliance. At the beginning of November last year, the procedure for adopting the new cycle of Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) between Serbia and NATO for the period 2019-2021 was successfully completed. Serbia's policy of military neutrality is not brought into question and the activities of Serbia and the content of cooperation, including military and other exercises in cooperation with other non-NATO members, are not to the detriment of our relations with the Alliance and the individual NATO member countries.

The situation in Kosovo and Metohija poses the greatest political and security challenge to Serbia. Serbia and NATO's obligations arise from the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and Military Technical Agreement, and it is imperative for both sides to fulfill these obligations. We expect NATO to observe and support our priorities with understanding, especially concerning Kosovo and Metohija. NATO-led KFOR mission plays an especially important role for the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija. Unfortunately, we believe that the security situation in the Province demands, if not greater then undiminished KFOR presence. Serbia strongly disapproves the transformation of the so-called "Kosovo Security Force" in the so called "Kosovo army", as it violates UN Security Council Resolution 1244 threatening regional and wider stability.

In parallel with security cooperation with our Western partners and NATO, we will continue to intensify our cooperation with other partners and friends across the

globe, such as the Russian Federation, China and other countries, with the aim of contributing to global peace and stability.

In the year 2020, we plan to both further extend and modernize the consular network and improve the quality of consular services provided to our citizens across the world. In the context of numerous cases involving diplomatic and consular services in protecting the interests and rights of our citizens, I would like to give special mention on this occasion to the successful resolving of the case concerning the abduction of the children of the Serbian citizen Slavica Burmazovic.

In the field of visa policy, we continued working on the harmonization of our visa system with EU standards and recommendations. Activities were simultaneously initiated with the aim of achieving visa liberalization through the conclusion of numerous bilateral agreements, so that the circle of countries to which our citizens can travel visa free will continue to enlarge in 2020. Serbian citizens can travel visa free to 71 countries, i.e. 94 with diplomatic and official passports, while the Serbian passport is ranked 39 according to the most recent estimate of the Henley Passport Index for 2020.

I would like to use this opportunity to mention the setting up of the “academic bridge” between Serbia and Israel with the opening of the Jewish Center in Belgrade and the Serbian Center in Jerusalem. I believe that these activities further contribute to the preservation and evaluation of historical facts, as well as universal human values.

Bearing in mind the importance of preserving and modernizing the archive database, we have begun the process of restoration, conservation and digitalization of 103 Treaties from the Diplomatic Archive in 2019, in cooperation with the National Library of Serbia.

In the course of the last year, we have realized a series of projects aimed at preserving the national and cultural identity of the Serbian diaspora and Serbs in the region and the protection of their rights, within the framework of the Program of Cooperation with the diaspora and Serbs in the region. In 2019, 414 projects for

diaspora and Serbs in the region were co-financed in the total amount of over 100 million dinars. We supported more than 200 youth tournaments, cultural and artistic events abroad and at home. A significant part entails more than 70 projects in support of organization of schools, camps and educational workshops for children and youth. A procurement was completed, aimed at improving teaching conditions of the Serbian language abroad, and primary school textbooks, reading materials and didactic materials started to be distributed. This year, we will deliver 8000 books to our children abroad.

It is essential to note that we are constantly working on enhancing and modernizing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself, placing special emphasis on the continued renewal and training of the diplomatic, administrative and technical staff, as well as the improvement of overall working conditions.

We strive to modernize in a responsible and rational manner the premises of our diplomatic and consular missions by purchasing new and reconstructing facilities already owned by the Republic of Serbia, when financial resources permit.

During 2019, five Memoranda on Cooperation were signed between the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and Diplomatic Academies of Tunisia, Malta, Guatemala, Bahrein and Ecuador.

Alongside taking care of the future of our diplomacy, we place attention on the protection of the documents which testify about the rich diplomatic history of our country. In this regard, I would like to highlight that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized an exhibition titled “100 Years of the Modern Diplomatic Archive” last December, in cooperation with the Archives of Yugoslavia.

I wish to underline in particular that we have continued the activities in the framework of the Regional Housing Programme aiming to ensure a permanent housing solution for the most vulnerable categories of refugees and displaced persons from the territory of the former Yugoslavia. In my capacity as President of the Commission for Coordination of Permanent Integration of Refugees, I had the opportunity to deliver,

throughout the last year, keys for newly built flats to refugee families who had lost their homes during the war conflicts. More than 4000 housing units have been provided so far in the Republic of Serbia and a total of 7000 families are expected to exercise their right. In cooperation with our foreign partners, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will endeavour to ensure too, in the years ahead, funding for the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme, until the problem of refugees and displaced persons who are among the most vulnerable members of our society is fully resolved.

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear friends,

I am convinced that our last year's results, and especially our goals for the upcoming year were not and could not have been completely fulfilled without your full cooperation that I am grateful for and I expect that we continue on the same path in the future. I cordially wish you a lot of success in the year to come, as well as all the best to you and your families.

Thank you!