



Statement by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the Panel "European security – relationship between NATO, EU and the Russian Federation" at the International Parliamentary Conference "Idea of the European Union, a path to peace and development", held in Belgrade, from 11-12 May:

"Distinguished Conference participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to address this panel devoted to European security.

The theme of the Conference "Idea of the European Union, a path to peace and development" reminds us of an important fact that the European Union was created as a great peace project, constituting a role model of the highest level of integration reached in modern political history, enabling long-term reconciliation among European peoples and countries of different political, security and cultural heritage. It is undoubtable that the times have changed since the establishment of the initial form of European integration, which evolved from the European community to the European Union. We are witnessing new challenges, accelerated globalization and technological development in all spheres of life and increased economic integration, inevitably bringing along some differences within the European Union framework.

Serbia and other Western Balkan countries are endeavouring to adjust to these circumstances and the on-going changes, while simultaneously pursuing – in accordance with their own potentials and capacities – their respective European paths, aimed not only at acquiring EU membership, but implementing the necessary reforms modernizing the social systems of the regional countries, empowering them to provide for their people all aspects of prosperity and social justice, under an indispensable condition of ensuring durable and long-term peace and stability.

Serbia has always believed in and strived for peace, dialogue, equality, social humanity and human dignity, sincerely contributing to the development of a safe and prosperous environment. As an EU candidate state, Serbia has fully contributed by pursuing a responsible policy, to the

enhancement of stability and security in this part of the European territory, which is exceptionally important to European security.

The EU Enlargement Strategy additionally encourages Serbia to improve and step-up its efforts towards reform of its state and society.

Serbia has been following attentively the activities undertaken by EU institutions in the process of preparing the Global Strategy on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, and welcomes its adoption wholeheartedly, in the belief that it is an appropriate way to respond to current security threats and challenges. We were particularly encouraged by the fact that the EU's Global Strategy clearly underlines that EU stability and security depend, inter alia, on the stability in the Balkans, and that a credible EU enlargement policy is an investment in European security and prosperity. Serbia has recognized and respected these European efforts. Serbia has initiated modification of national documents in security and defence areas, i.e. the National Security Strategy and the Defence Strategy, which are currently the subject of public debate. The essential commitments guiding us in the process included an integrated approach to security, military neutrality and EU membership. It is our true desire to align our strategic documents, as speedily and effectively as possible, with the said Global Strategy for the EU, while endeavouring concurrently to protect our vital national interests in the best possible way, which is undoubtedly the objective of every country adopting such strategies.

Serbia has also been following seriously, with due attention, all the initiatives launched by the European Union to the effect of strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy, reflected in the adoption of documents including the European Defence Action Plan, European Defence Fund, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, and particularly the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). All these projects and initiatives are highly important to Serbia too, as it wishes to join them as soon as conditions are met. It is upon the EU to determine the potential modalities to that end, while Serbia stands open to talks and possible engagements in this sphere of European policies, as it has previously joined many European policy concepts in the Common European and Defence Policy area, thus demonstrating consistence in its commitment to Europe, readiness to share duties and responsibilities in facing security challenges, and contributing to permanent stability and security of the European space, which is an essential condition for any progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Serbia has a true desire to progress on its European path and contribute to the promotion of peace and security in Europe. I believe that you will share my view that Negotiation Chapter 31 – Foreign, Security and Defence Policy is too often reduced solely to the issue of alignment with EU decisions and declarations, while Serbia's numerous efforts, activities and achievements in other areas included in this Chapter are unjustifiably and unjustly side-tracked, a proof of which are specific results which I had an opportunity to discuss at many similar meetings where I participated. However, it is not superfluous to make a brief reference to them, once again. In addition to Serbia's participation in six UN peacekeeping missions, its participation in four EU multinational operations (in Mali, Central African Republic, and two operations in Somalia) indicates that Serbia is a credible partner, sharing responsibility and making its contribution to

the preservation of peace and security. According to statistical indicators and the number of troops, Serbia is among the top countries in Europe and the leader in the region, while it is ranking high within the global frameworks. A further contribution will be made by sending our civil structures to join multinational operations, on which we have been working hard by providing the required legal and institutional frameworks. Specifically, the Action Plan for building capacities for sending civilians to join multinational operations has entered the Government endorsement procedure, a few days ago. May I recall that Serbia is only one out of four non-EU Member States that have signed the administrative arrangement with the European Defence Agency. Serbia has also joined the HELBROC Battlegroup, which will contribute to promoting cooperation not only with the EU, but with the other member countries of this initiative, as well. Last November, we sent our national liaison officer to the EU Military Headquarters, which is a great honour for our country, considering that among non-EU Member States, the privilege has also been granted only to the United States. We see this as recognition of Serbia's activities and participation in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, but also as the result of our mutual assessment that this will contribute to further strengthening of our cooperation and more effective communication.

The position of Serbia in the promotion of regional stability and its contribution to the regional cooperation on bilateral and multilateral level are particularly important for the overall security in Europe. Wishing to approach any outstanding issues in a responsible way with everyone in the region, while seeking compromise solutions that would be sustainable in the long term, Serbia continuously initiates topics for the future of interest for the entire region, to make it more attractive for potential investors and to increase trade, persisting at the same time in supporting projects, both in infrastructure and other sectors, going beyond national borders and representing an investment for the future and a basis for economic and other prosperity, as well as for lasting security and stability in the region, without which the European security will not be complete and rounded up. It is exactly in these fields that Serbia shows its devotion to the values shared by the people of Europe: assuming responsibility in the framework of CSDP policies, concerning European and global peace and stability, as well as actively participating in its own neighbourhood through the policy of cooperation and reconciliation promoting stability and opportunities for prosperity, not only of its own citizens but also those in its neighbourhood. The issue of connectivity should prevail over issues of separation and isolation, making all actors grow apart and preventing them from strengthening understanding and building trust. Distinguished conference participants,

I believe that the normalization of relations between NATO and the EU, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other hand, is very important, because it is a prerequisite for stability, including for the economic and any other progress in Europe and the world. Through fruitful exchange of opinions, this type of events can contribute to finding different ways to thaw relations between the major stability-makers in the world.

As a small, but proud country, which was put to the test many times in its history, but always faithful to the principles of freedom and justice, Serbia wishes to protect its own national interests in the best possible way, and at the same time be a factor which contributes to regional, European, but also global peace and prosperity, within the limits of its capacities. Serbia wishes to develop relations with all powerful factors of the world politics, thereby making its own security sustainable, but at the same time helping achieve peace and security in the Western Balkans region, as its immediate neighbourhood.

Serbia pursues the policy of military neutrality and does not intend to become a member of the existing military alliances. On this basis it cooperates with NATO as a partner state through the Partnership for Peace programme. Military neutrality is not an obstacle to the development of partner cooperation in the interest of strengthening global, and especially regional security. On the other hand, Serbia maintains a transparent cooperation with the Russian Federation, which does not harm our cooperation with the Alliance and vice versa, nor is it an obstacle to attaining our strategic foreign policy goal – joining the EU, which was demonstrated in practice as well – namely, Serbia takes part in military exercises with NATO and its member states, but also with the Russian Federation and other states, since in this way it can best fulfil its national interests. I believe that good relations between Russia and NATO are crucial for peace and security in the world and for successfully responding to global challenges and threats, such as terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization and any other form of contemporary security challenges. As regards regional stability, apart from developing cooperation with the most powerful factors of the world politics, the Republic of Serbia, as a responsible member of the international community, started with what it can make the most significant contribution to. In the context of active commitment to foster and maintain good neighbourly relations and solve any issues through open and honest dialogue, we have launched initiatives on many occasions aiming at a stronger connection of the region, especially in the field of economy.

For Serbia, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is crucial for regional security, but also for security beyond Europe. The situation in the Province is the biggest political security challenge for Serbia, but on the other hand this situation brings a series of security threats, concerning primarily a number of unacceptable unilateral acts of Pristina and failure to implement what has been agreed by the Brussels Agreement, which causes harm to the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina; organized crime and terrorism, as well as deterioration of the security situation in the Province. Serbia does not recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, but wishes to reach a solution for the issue of Serbian-Albanian relations through compromise, at the same time showing readiness to conduct a status-neutral dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina in order to solve concrete issues of interest for the citizens who live in the Province. It is exactly this position of Serbia that confirms our contributions to the preservation of regional peace and stability and avoidance of conflicts.

It is with deep conviction that I want to acknowledge on this occasion that Serbia has become an important factor – a source of security and stability in the Western Balkans and a reliable partner to anyone who wants partnership. Such orientation is a matter of principle and we work continuously on its realization, but at the same time we expect other parties to follow the same approach.

Thank you for your attention."