



Address by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic at the opening of the exhibition entitled "Serbia-Russia, Yugoslavia-USSR", dedicated to 180 years of diplomatic relations between Serbia and Russia

"Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me particular pleasure to address this revered gathering on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition of documents entitled "SERBIA - RUSSIA. YUGOSLAVIA - USSR", marking 180th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. I express my gratitude to the Archive of Serbia and the Archive of Yugoslavia that have undoubtedly put a lot of energy and effort into the organization of this exhibition.

I would like to point out the history of our relations and building of traditionally friendly ties between the two nations. The meeting between Serbian Prince Milos Obrenovic and Russian Consul Gerasim Vasiljevic Vastchenko, at the Prince's Residence in Kragujevac, on 23 February 1838, marked the beginning of diplomatic relations. This event constitutes a renewal of ties between the two peoples and states in full capacity within the centuries-long common history characterized by the Slav origin, the same cultural and civilization roots, spiritual kinship and religious ties. All of this has influenced the formation of the fraternal character of the relations between our two peoples, regardless of huge geographic distance between them. Ever since the cooperation between our two countries has gone beyond the ordinary framework of inter-state relations.

Although the year 1838 marks the beginning of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Serbia and Russia, historically, our relations and cooperation were established well before this date. The beginning of cooperation between the Serbs and the Russians goes back to the 12th century, when the future founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church Rastko Nemanjic i.e. St. Sava, became a monk at the then Russian Saint Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos. In 1219, St. Sava became the first Archbishop of the Autocephalous Serbian Church and had the Collection of Ecclesiastical and Civil Laws called the Nomocanon, "Zakonopravilo or "Krmcija", published. The Nomocanon, known in Russia as early as the 13th century, played a major role in the field of canon law and state-law science and tradition in Russia.

Within the Kremlin walls, in the Cathedral of the Archangel, there are frescoes depicting St. Simeon (Stefan Nemanja) and St. Sava (Rastko Nemanjic), which speaks of the reputation and significance attached to these Serbian rulers and saints in Russia. This also highlights the family ties between the Russian ruling family and the Serbian Nemanjic dynasty. Namely,

Russian Emperor Ivan the Fearsome had Serbian origin as well, since his grandmother on his mother's side was Ana Jaksic from the famous mediaeval noble family. Also, the cult of St. Sava was established in 17th-century Russia.

Serbia supported Russia during Mongolian-Tatar slavery. At that time, the Serbian rulers sent their contributions to the Russian Monastery on Mount Athos and provided other kinds of assistance to Russia.

The breakdown of the Serbian mediaeval state coincided with the period of the reinforcement of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Thus, Russia, being the only powerful and free Orthodox country in the world, became a shelter for many Serbs in late 15th century. In that context, I would underline the significance of Russia's centuries-long assistance to the Serbian Church in these difficult times, which was valuable for Serbs, given that, under Turkish rule, the Church was the only institution that preserved the existence of Serbs. The first serious school establishments in the Metropolitanate of Karlovci existed thanks to Russian teachers and books sent from Russia. During the reign of Peter the Great, teachers came from Russia and organized an enlightenment mission, spreading Russian books among the local Serbs. Particularly important role in the survival of the Serbian people and Serbian culture Russia took on itself after the so-called First and Second large migration of Serbs in the 17th i.e. 18th century. Immediately after these two large-scale movements of Serbs there came one that was essentially different – the migration to the "Imperial Russia". Namely, Russia opened the door for Serb emigrants, many of whom left an indelible mark on Russian history, like Generals Mihajlo Andrejevic Miloradovic, Jovan Jerogovic Sevic, Nikola Ivanovic de Preradovic, and other prominent military leaders. Even before these large-scale Serbian population movements to Russia at the time of King Peter the Great, but in much fewer numbers, a part of the Serbs settled in Russia, including the diplomat in the service of Peter the Great Sava Vladislavic.

The time of the statehood building in the then Serbian Principality coincided with the establishment of the Russian Consulate in Serbia. The Treaty of Adrianople, which ended the Russian-Turkish War in 1828-1829, granted autonomy to countries liberated during the First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813). The achievement of this goal was made possible by Tsar Nikolai's policy and Russia's assistance in acquiring statehood for Serbia, establishing constitutional foundations and creating the standing army that contributed to the final liberation of Serbian territories.

The Russian state assisted Serbian people financially and militarily in the liberation wars against the Turks from 1876 to 1878. Many of the Russian volunteers, led by General Mikhail Charnayev, built their lives into the foundations of new Serbian freedom. Let us recall the Russian Colonel Nikolay Nikolaevich Raevsky, whom the famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy used to create a character named Vronsky in his novel "Anna Karenina", who was slain in battle near Aleksinac as commander.

Two world wars, mutual support and fighting on the same sides, with enormous human and material losses, further strengthen the ties between the Serbian and Russian peoples. Serbia remembers, in particular, the sincere and fraternal support of Russian Tsar Nikolai II in 1914, who resolutely stood up in defence of the Serbian people at one of the most difficult moments in its history. Following the October Revolution in 1917 and tragic events from the civil war, Serbia received tens of thousands of Russian emigrants who have significantly contributed to the development of the Serbian economy, science, culture and art. I would especially like to single out Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov - a famous architect, who contributed to the construction of Belgrade, and who, among other things, designed the present building of the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs. I also wish to mention Bishop Antony Hrapovicky, the Byzantologist Georgy Ostrogorsky, the ballet dancer Nina Kirsanova and many others.

After the Second World War, even at the time of ideological disagreements, ties, closeness and support between the two peoples remained unbreakable. Even today, when the Republic of Serbia faces many challenges, along with developed economic relations, Russia provides great assistance to the Serbian state, which we are extremely grateful for.

Bilateral relations between the Republic of Serbia and the Russian Federation, 180 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations, are exceptionally good and developed. Cooperation between the two countries, on the level of strategic partnership, has been very dynamic in recent years and included frequent meetings between senior officials. Only this year had we a series of high-level visits and meetings organized: a visit by Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, to Belgrade, on the occasion of the 180th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the visit of Serbian President Alexander Vucic to Moscow on the occasion of the Victory Day and his recent working visit to Moscow. This year alone I visited the Russian Federation four times. Soon we are expecting a very important event for the development of our bilateral relations, the announced visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Serbia in January next year, which we are very much looking forward to.

The Russian Federation provides firm and consistent support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia and strongly upholds our positions and policy on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, which we are genuinely grateful for. We are most grateful to the Russian Federation for the vocal and consistent support at the recent Interpol General Assembly meeting in Dubai, where our country had great success as Pristina's membership bid lost the vote. Both Serbia and Russia hold the view that only through a dialogue and with respect for international law, acceptable and lasting solutions to all problems can be reached. Serbia is today on its European course, but this path is not and it cannot be an obstacle to close and fraternal relations with Russia. In this regard, Serbia is not and will not join the sanctions against Russia in the future.

The Russian Federation is one of the strategic economic partners of the Republic of Serbia. There is the free trade regime in force between the two countries, which greatly contributes to the growth of trade.

The commodity exchange in recent years was marked by a significant growth, to which an increase in exports of our agricultural products also contributed. The growth potential of the commodity exchange between the two countries is far from being exploited, and we are working to increase it in the coming years, from the current level of around 3 billion to 4 billion dollars. The Russian Federation is also a very important investor in the Serbian economy and according to investments made in this decade it occupies the fourth place.

Cooperation in the energy sector is very successful, and for Serbia it is extremely important that the Russian side considers the "Turk Stream" pipeline route the priority, which would pass through our country thus providing a stable gas supply and enabling Serbia to become a transit country for gas.

Serbia is a military neutral country and Russia appreciates that. In the military field, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in military-technical cooperation that enables the modernization of our army.

Lately, cooperation in the scientific-technical and innovation field has been significantly intensified. An intensified cultural cooperation between the two countries has developed. Cultural and artistic events are being regularly held, in which a very important role is played by the Russian Centre for Science and Culture, an institution celebrating 85 years of existence this year for the occasion of which I extend my sincere congratulations. The initiative to open a Serbian Cultural Centre in Moscow is also very important.

The Russian Federation is a very important donor of humanitarian aid to our country. It approved a \$2 million aid for the reconstruction of monasteries and monuments in Kosovo and Metohija. It was the first to react during the catastrophic floods in 2014 and thanks to the activities of the Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre, it delivered technical and humanitarian aid in record time. The Government of the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church provide very significant financial and professional assistance in the painting of the interior of the St. Sava Church, which is a symbol of cooperation between the two brotherly people.

Our vision of the development of relations with the Russian Federation is based on solid and unwavering friendship and close ties between our two peoples, as well as on mutual support and understanding. What requires dedication and is a task for the future is a continued effort to make the citizens of both countries feel the betterment of the stronger economic ties and accelerated development of cooperation in all areas.

I would like to thank Russia, once again, for its firm and consistent support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia and to its policy on Kosovo and Metohija issue, in the situation when we are facing attempts by the so-called Kosovo at gaining international recognition and membership in international organizations reserved for the states; aspirations to create the so-called Kosovo Army; "Trade warfare", and the latest incursion of ROSU into the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, when all the arguments are on our side, and when we have fulfilled our commitments.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to open this very important and substantive exhibition, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, which is another contribution to the development of relations between Serbia and the Russian Federation."