



Mrs. Mogherini,
Minister Haaavisto,
Dear colleagues,

I also join other colleagues in commending our hosts and Minister Haavisto, in particular, for the cordial welcome and excellent organization of this event in an uncommon format.

You are all familiar with the fact that full EU membership is the key foreign policy priority of Serbia. Aside from Serbia, the whole region too belongs to the EU and without the integration of the Western Balkans, the common economic and political area on the European continent will not be complete. In view of the above, a clear message was recently sent by German Chancellor Merkel. In that context, it is very important that the enlargement issue remains on top of the EU agenda and that of the new composition of its institutions.

Serbia holds the view that this type of meeting always presents a good opportunity for views exchange between EU Member States and EU candidate countries.

What we do not understand is why the common format for this type of meeting has been changed this time. If the practice thus far has been to hold these meetings in the format of Foreign Ministers of EU Member States and candidate countries, we see no reason for the format to be changed. EU criteria for obtaining status of a candidate country for membership are very clear and those include the achievement of expected results in the integration process, based on joint decision made by Member States. That is why the format in which today's event has been convened is unnatural as it is not based on those criteria and creates a precedent of sorts. This was the first time in practice that a territory that is far from the EU candidate status has been invited to a meeting in this format. We do understand that the decision to invite is at discretion of the EU High Representative but still we need to point to the unprincipled nature of it.

On the other hand, if the purpose of the meeting is to encourage regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, i.e. "to reset regional dynamics" as stated in the invitation for this meeting, it remains unclear how the meeting can help encourage regional cooperation when all participants are aware that at present the conduct of Pristina poses a major obstacle to the promotion of regional cooperation. The objections are made against Serbia on account of its international activities which are fully legitimate while what Pristina is doing is essentially illegal. Actually, the

difference between them is huge. Failure to honor the Brussels Agreement commitments, flagrant violation of CEFTA by draconic tariffs imposed on products from central Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, attempts to form an army in contravention of the valid UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999), efforts to distort historical facts and abuse cultural heritage, limiting freedom of movement for officials and citizens from central Serbia to Kosovo and Metohija, etc., in this sense cannot be construed as steps towards promotion of regional cooperation.

At the same time, it is abundantly clear to the Republic of Serbia that all issues discussed in the EU-facilitated dialogue with Pristina cannot figure on the regional cooperation agenda before a solution is reached through dialogue. Regional cooperation cannot be a substitute for dialogue.

In view of the foregoing, as we have repeated time and again, we expect EU to take appropriate and decisive steps to influence Pristina to abandon unilateral acts and enable the continuation of dialogue, thus contributing to easing the tensions in the region.

At the same time, I would like to point out that regional cooperation, without any doubt, represents one of the Republic of Serbia's foreign policy priorities. We are committed to its promotion since it contributes to the reconciliation process and gives an added impetus to the region's development in many areas. It goes without saying that this is only possible within a given and agreed framework to which we all consent. A precondition for successful implementation and promotion of regional cooperation is, as I have already mentioned, strict compliance with the agreements signed and regional cooperation frameworks agreed by all participants in the region, without exception.

Even though our side strongly supports dialogue on the normalization of relations with Pristina, it is necessary to emphasize that flagrant violation of CEFTA by Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina deserves to be more vigorously condemned and I repeat – it needs to be urgently stopped. In addition, it is in violation of the Regional Economic Area (REA) principles, i.e. serious departure from, and breach of, regional cooperation in general. As you are probably aware, the dialogue may be resumed only after tariffs imposed by Pristina are removed. That would certainly be a minimum condition for "resetting regional dynamics".

Serbia is actively involved in all areas of regional cooperation. The Connectivity Agenda must be endorsed, and we believe that attention should be focused on the search for more affordable sources of finance intended for infrastructural projects previously agreed within the Connectivity Agenda. We are all in need of a more affordable financial support by the EU. In our opinion, this would help to "reset regional dynamics".

Infrastructure is what literally brings us closer together, while creating preconditions to all other types of connectivity. It is infrastructure that most citizens of our region will recognize as a substantive step forward. We believe that reconciliation and confidence-building go hand in hand with connectivity – the more and more easily our citizens, youth in particular, meet, talk to each other and do business, the smoother and quicker the process will get. Historical revisionism, at the same time, has been unhelpful no place, especially in vulnerable territories like ours. History is supposed to teach us not to make the same mistakes. It is for this reason that it is one of the obstacles that needs to be overcome in order to reshape or reset regional

cooperation.

Short of the political awareness of the need to build bridges, come up with new areas of cooperation, while expanding the existing ones, regardless of the region's diversity and its disparities, we shall not be able to "reset regional dynamics". Progress will not be within reach as long as cooperation takes second to the wish of some to come across as equals in their own right, while stripping the region of the opportunity to advance and even calling into question its stability. Many cooperation opportunities are opening up, and we have signed up for it in the interest of our citizens. Instead of portraying everyone in the region as equal states, instead of violating commitments and stalling cooperation where cooperation is possible, and instead of putting one-sided interests and unrealistic ambitions before the region and progress, all participants must embrace a responsible, devoted and above all realistic approach. Only then will we be able to discuss "the resetting of regional dynamics".

Thank you for your kind attention.