
INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR OF SERBIA TO BIH, H.E. STANIMIR VUKICEVIC

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I have been in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 8 years in 2 terms. Thus, I believe that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially the people who deal with this business, know me well. That is my privilege and honor. I was born in Kosovo, where I finished the Law school. I have been in diplomacy for 40 years. I served in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, Croatia and BiH again, and as a young diplomat, while it was the Federal Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, I was in Somalia as the first secretary. I experience Bosnia and Herzegovina as my second country. Those 8 years of diplomatic experience mean something, especially as it is a country that is neighboring us and with which we have many good relations, many things that we want to solve, many things that we deal with, much of which should be a benefit for both BiH and Serbia, especially for BiH and Serbian citizens. Im a widower, my wife died, I have a son, two grandchildren and a daughter-in-law.

ST: Please tell us something about the bilateral relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in economics terms. What is the trade exchange between BiH and Serbia? How much did Serbia invest in BiH last year (and previous years)?

Serbia and BiH are very important partners to each other. The volume of trade between Serbia and BiH last year it was over a billion Euros. The trend indicates that this number will be two billion Euros this year or the next when you look at statistics, BiH is third or fourth largest partner, but if we look logically, the EU is a much larger area and we import a lot of energy from Russia so thats why those two are before BiH. BiH takes the second place and surely the first place in our commodity exchange and economic cooperation in the region. We have plenty of plans. Our investments in BiH are close 800 million, so far. We are ready to invest in BiH and in those economic affairs and economic cooperation we are guiding projects that can be of use both for BiH and for Serbia.

First, we have a memorandum on joint representation on third markets. Its something that we signed last year but still hasnt become fully operational. And the intention is for us to fulfill the quotas that are expected from us, since we are competitive in these markets and we are competitive for investments from other countries. In this context, we are also proposing a unified market when it comes to the entire region. It would be much more attractive because it would be a market of 20 million people.

We now have the CEFTA, as a treaty that allows tariff-free export, but there are certain obstacles that president Aleksandar Vucic talked about when he visited BiH and that we have to eliminate,

namely the non-tariff barriers that make trucks wait at the border for a long time, which raises the price of goods. In this unified market, it would be eliminated and everything would have a much better flow, meaning that this unified market is not a negation of CEFTA, but on the contrary, it is the promotion of CEFTA trade, nor is it against the EU because the EU would like to have such a regional organization, since through this, they see the progress of both Serbia and BiH, as well as Macedonia, Montenegro and all the other countries in this area.

When it comes to trade also I told you already that we are going to some set a goal of trade worth 2 billion Euros. In that context, we would like to improve the infrastructure with the abolition of all these tariffs, so that we can reach this goal. Another area in which we want to make significant progress with BiH is precisely that □ traffic infrastructure. For the time being, all of the roads we have in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are older roads that do not meet the needs of either country. Nor do they meet the standards of the EU and we think that Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina should be connected by modern roads. We have a project for the Belgrade-Sarajevo highway. If there wasn't an investor for it, then we'd just have a ramp from the highway towards Montenegro towards Visegrad and BiH would decide the rest of the path. We hope that they will determine this route of the road and that in the near future there will be a modern highway. For now it is just as an idea, just like the one that would have the highway be a part of Corridor VC to Zenica, from Zenica to build a highway towards Tuzla, Tuzla-Brcko, Brcko-Bijeljina and after going towards Serbia.

We also have bridges. We have 11 bridges on the river Drina, some of them older. BiH and Serbia have agreed to monitor the state of all these bridges, make an elaborate of the needed adjustments, and their reconstruction. It is my pleasure to say that we have a new bridge between Ljubovija and Bratunac. In order to let traffic on that bridge needs, we need customs offices for customs clearance and so on, on this side of BiH, because it is stupid to have two customs offices on both sides of the river, so we agreed for one to be on the BiH side, in Bratunac.

The Drina River is so great in terms of hydroelectric potential. Currently, there are power plants in Bajina Basta and Zvornik. However, Drina provides much more than just a hydroelectric potential. We should look at all its possibilities and perspectives both in the field of tourism and in the field agriculture and water management, even those areas of maintaining clean water and controlling them. We have tourism as one potential and very profitable opportunity. There are not so many opportunities for us.

We have the potential for marine tourism, the Adriatic Sea. We have the potential for winter tourism □ Bjelasnica, Igman, Jahorina, Lopaonik, mountain Kupres. We have the potential for alpinism, our mountains are all suitable for this. We have the potential for rafting, and Tara and Vrbas and Neretva and Una and Ivar, so that I cannot enumerate all these rivers. We have potential for health tourism, there are many spas in Serbia and Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. We have the potential for this conditionally referred religious tourism because we have many medieval mosques, cathedrals, monasteries, etc. We have many of these buildings which are UNESCO world heritage sites, we have the bridge on the Drina, we have the Old Bridge in Mostar. That is what a lot of what tourists would want to see.

Im not listing but we also have rural tourism, eco-tourism and more. On the other hand, we have a very good geographic location. We have the Danube, the aorta of Europe, and have the possibility to be, as I would say, available to the Middle East and Europe. Therefore, everyone can use our location to move to some other places they want to see or from which they will travel further.

That's when it comes to tourism. We have projects for biking trails. It's just the talks we talked about, and that biking trail would go from Belgrade to Sarajevo, and from Sarajevo to Dubrovnik. Biking has become a recognizable trend in Europe. People could use their vacation or part of their vacation to bike through these beautiful places. To look at all the beauties and certainly come again.

In addition to this economic cooperation of all these projects, we also have a rich cultural cooperation, as much is happening in the culture between BiH and Serbia. Guest performers, guest performers and concerts, to name a few. I do not know how much space you have to write. Otherwise, I would say a lot.

ST: Serbia will contribute approximately 5.5 million Euros to the municipality in Republika Srpska, as well as other municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Serbs predominantly live. Can you tell us more about this?

Serbia has allocated 5.5 million for the assistance of several municipalities in RS and for assistance to the municipalities of Drvar, Grahovo, Glamoc and Bosanski Petrovac in the Federation. I mean, it seems to me that Serbia is now able to help Serbs in BiH. Croats have been doing that for years. They work for years to help their mothers, those in the diaspora at least, but my nation is a neighboring country. That's why we helped Vlasenica build a dormitory, East Sarajevo to build a market, Pale to repair the road, etc. We give money that we think will help people live better, to create better conditions and to make their lives more decent. This also applies to these 3-4 municipalities in the Federation that are in a very bad condition, and it seems to me that this help means a lot to them. This helps Drvar, Grahovo and Glamoc a lot.

This money will not prevent emigration but will help people to have a little more will and increase living conditions. President Vucic, at one point, said that we would like to see BiH do the same as Serbia, that is to help people to have a better life, to have more comfortable living conditions, better conditions for schooling of children.

ST: In what direction will future cooperation be, economic and political, between BiH and Serbia? What are the open questions?

You see, we see cooperation through an open dialogue, mutual recognition, recognition of territorial integrity, sovereign entities, and not making any problems for each other. I do not think that until now, any statement that came from Serbia, from President Vucic or members the government was worrying about BiH. Our cooperation is the cooperation of a good neighborhood and we want to as intensively interact with each other. So, an open dialogue about the problems about which we may not have a common opinion, is necessary. We've already invited the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, specifically the Collegium of the Assembly, to return to a return visit to Belgrade because the President of the National Assembly of Serbia was here last year. Then in November we will have a joint session of the Government of BiH and the Government of the Republic of Serbia in Belgrade, because it was here in 2016. And there is also the possibility that the members of the Presidency will come to Belgrade in December, depending on whether there are conditions and whether they are previously reached.

So we want an intensive political cooperation, to have an open dialogue. We are ready to address everything that stands as a problem. So we raised the question of the boundaries. Here we have 97% border lines already determined, and 3% not specified, these 3% make us not 100%. We

talked about that, we agreed on the principles on which we should work together so that even 3% of the border will be solved. The Commission will do this and we will see and we expect this. In December, we hope to have some sort of result. We are talking about submerged land.

We also talked about the possibilities of joint appearance of the electric power industry in Europe. It is all the way we want from BiH in both economic and political terms. Relations with BiH are evaluated as very good, very correct, we have good mutual cooperation, support one another. We are on the same international plane, and we are ready to give support regarding European integrations. We want BiH to become a candidate for membership in the EU as soon as possible, we want to answer Brussels. Our answers to the ECs questionnaire are not that different than those of BiH because we are in the same region. We suffer the same problems of the same disease. We support BiH in this direction and we are ready to continue in that.

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