**"Kosovo - from importer of security resources to stabilizing factor in security architecture of South East Europe" –**

**Talk with Kosovo's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hashim Thaci**

Firstly, let me thank you all for the possibility to speak with you in this event dedicated to Kosovo and Balkans. I also thank Daniel Serwer who is a big friend of our region and has played a very important role with his reports on progress in Balkans. I always enjoy reading him and I always enjoy being his guest

Some of you – or most of you – know Kosovo very well. It’s a new country, youngest in Europe and it was created in a process of negotiations under President Ahtisaari. Kosovo is now recognized by 108 countries and is a member of Olympic Committee, World Bank, IMF, EBRD, and many regional organizations.

We also expect this year to sign our Stabilization Association Agreement as well as to apply for membership to Council of Europe.

We are in peaceful relations with all our neighbors and for two years now, we also have a historic agreement for normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. I was sitting with Prime Minister Dacic for two hundred hours with Baroness Ashton and we managed to sign an agreement – as an example how to achieve peace in Balkans, despite war and conflict in the past.

Allow me to focus on five points very important on position of Kosovo in European security architecture.

1. Kosovo was a place of war and blood. I was a leader of Kosovo Liberation Army, a guerilla movement so I experience myself issues of life and death. Also, in 1991 there was war in Croatia, in 1993 there was a war in Bosnia, in 2000 there was conflict in Preshevo valley, in 2001 there was conflict in Macedonia. NOW – all countries of former Yugoslavia are in peace and in the process of EU integrations. So, for the first time in history, all of us are in process of peace and dedicated to cooperation. In Berlin last august, all Prime Ministers agreed to work in regional cooperation and to think of our economy in regional terms. This is important development and Kosovo will continue to give contribution to regional cooperation. My first visits as foreign minister were to the region, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and I am meeting PM Vucic and minister Dacic together with PM Isa Mustafa next week. I support also economic projects like Adriatic – Jon highway and connection between Kosovo and Serbia and other projects that connect Balkan economies.
2. Region is at peace, but situation is not as clear as it used to be 10 years ago. New elements are now influencing events in Balkans: Bigger Role of Russia and smaller role of USA. USA was always big player and most important player. USA was behind Dayton agreement but also Rambouillet Agreement and was also supporting Vienna talks between Kosovo and Serbia and Brussels talks. Last years, focus is not there anymore. Problems in Middle East, problems in Ukraine and other global issues in China, Korea means USA is not anymore the most important player to provide balance and action when needed. On the other hand Russia was before not important but now is becoming very important player. Russia influences Hungary, alsi directly is active in Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. There is some speculation that old Orthodox link is now functioning, but I don’t believe in religious link. I think Russia is playing strategic games to destroy progress in Balkans because it’s a joint EU – American progress. Russiahas energy interests but also political interests to keep the backyard of Europe unstable. This is a new development. We are still not sure what are the implications for security situation. Russia doesn’t recognize Kosovo but it used Kosovo as example for annexation of parts of Ukraine. Any connection between Ukraine and Kosovo is not logical or correct but we see it happening every day in Russian media.
3. Kosovo is also facing challenges because of cultural background. We are a secular republic, very open to all religions. Many Albanians are Muslims, but we also have respect for Catholics and Orthodox. War in Kosovo was not about religion but about territory. We have saved Jews in Second World War and I also work very much to make strong ties between Kosovo and Israel. But world after 9-11 is not same. World after Iraq and Syria war is not same. Even more important, world after Facebook is not same. Now some young people in Kosovo or Norway or Germany, via Facebook they receive propaganda and they become very radicalized. We are now facing challenge of extremist groups. Kosovo government was very forceful and we arrested many imams and many foreign fighters. Our parliament last week voted to ban all participation in foreign wars. But we must work very hard, more hard than other in Balkans to break prejudice about danger from Muslim Kosovo. There is no danger from Muslim Kosovo because Kosovo is not Muslim country but a secular country with majority Muslim population.
4. Kosovo is also most pro-American nation in planet. Over 90% of our people love America, our main streets are named after Bill Clinton, George Bush – Father and Son – Madeleine Albright, Tom Lantosh, Bob Dole. We are both Republican and Democrat because Kosovo issue in Congress was not party issue but national issue. But to be pro-American today in the world brings you some problems. We had problems with recognitions in some Arab countries because we are too American, like in Libya before revolution. We also have problem in Europe where some countries look at Kosovo as American project. We need to work more to make sure that some European countries understand that America in Kosovo was not because of oil or because of minerals, but because of principles. To recognize Kosovo as independent is to also believe in principles of international law. Radical movements on the fascist side or communist side don’t like Kosovo because Kosovo was essentially a liberal project. Our constitution is also liberal. This is becoming maybe a problem in a world of radical ideas and extremist political movements.
5. We must also work on increasing participation of people in democracy. In 2015, young people are used to democracy and they forget the war. You have forgotten the Second World War but even Kosovo youth have forgotten Kosovo war and your youth have forgotten Iraq war. We must find new models of civil society engagement. I am not sure how – but apathy is biggest enemy of our democracies. Apathy makes also young people go to tragic wars in Middle East. We must produce more economic opportunity for young people. I think economy is the basis for all opportunities but also all dangers in Kosovo, region and wider world.

We are trying in Kosovo to bring investments. We expect 400 million investment in ski tourism from French company and 1 billion from American company in Thermal Energy Plant but this is not enough. A new model of growth is needed that produces more jobs and more engaged people in democracy.