



# Weekly Briefing

**Serbia External Relations briefing:  
Serbia's vivid and diverse diplomatic activity  
IIPE**

## China-CEE Institute

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## **Serbia's vivid and diverse diplomatic activity in May 2018**

*During May 2018, senior officials of the Republic of Serbia (President, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as several other ministers) had meetings with senior or high officials representing other countries and international organizations. The topics discussed during these meetings spanned from bilateral political and economic relations to regional issues and unsolved questions such as the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, regarding the status of Serbia's southern Province.*

Most significant meetings were the ones held by President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic. At the beginning of May, precisely on May 6-7, Vucic visited Turkey, where he was welcomed by Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. On the first day of his visit, Vucic said in Istanbul that the credit for the very good relations between Serbia and Turkey belonged to the Turkish president, and invited Turkish companies to continue to invest in Serbia. Vucic noted that Serbia and Turkey had increased their trade by a factor of nine over the past decade. The following day, Erdogan told reporters in Ankara that Turkey would contribute to anything that would bring lasting peace and stability in the Balkans, noting that project of constructing the Belgrade-Sarajevo highway was the project of peace and development.

The next day, President Vucic was already in Moscow in order to attend the Victory Day parade on May 9. On May 8, presidents of Russia and Serbia Vladimir Putin and Aleksandar Vucic met to discuss the state and prospects of the Russia-Serbia cooperation, progress of joint investment projects and current regional issues. The following day, after meeting President Putin, President Vucic stressed as important that Serbia and Russia had fortified their friendship and cooperation in all domains, adding that a great amount of time was devoted

to Kosovo and Metohija during this meeting. “We have no taboos and I think that Putin understands me and the position of Serbia as I try to understand the position of Russia. We are friends and our relation is based on trust and reliance on each other,” Vucic told RTS upon his arrival from Moscow.

President Vucic and President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades met in Belgrade on May 10 to discuss the issues of Kosovo, European integration and deepening bilateral cooperation. After the meeting with Vucic, Anastasiades said that his country strongly supported Serbia’s territorial integrity and did not recognize Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence.

On May 15, Serbian President visited German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. He said in Dusseldorf that Serbia was satisfied with trade with Germany and noted the expectance of closer economic bonds with North Rhine-Westphalia.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic met with numerous senior EU officials and leaders of the EU member states in Sofia, where he attended the EU-West Balkans summit on May 16-17. Vucic met with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Theresa May and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Topics discussed during these meetings were: resuming the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations, situation in the region, the migrant crisis and bilateral relations between Serbia and above-mentioned countries. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on May 16 in Sofia that he had not received any US plans for solving the situation with “Kosovo”, adding that he did get “indications and principles” in which he saw “some decent things”, but also solutions he did not agree with.

Serbian President visited Azerbaijan on May 21. He said in Baku that Azerbaijan’s support meant very much to Serbia, having noted that a block of states that value their independence and freedom is being created, based on mutual respect. “Azerbaijan greatly respects Serbia, and Serbia feels the same about Azerbaijan,” Vucic said to reporters. The President said that Azerbaijan

was very important to Serbia as a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the majority of which is largely unsupportive of Serbia in the “Kosovo” affair.

Finally, on May 23 in Belgrade, it was announced that President of China Xi Jinping responded to a letter from his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic, who had asked for close cooperation with China in all areas of mutual importance. Chinese President wrote that he was paying great attention to the development of Sino-Serbian relations and that he was ready to invest the effort, together with Vucic, in order to elevate relations between the two countries to a new level. Xi voiced pleasure that Vucic was paying such great attention to relations with China, advocating the advancing of the practical cooperation between the two nations, the Serbian President’s office said in a press release.

Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic also had several important meetings with foreign state officials. She also met with Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades on May 10, when she assessed that relations between the two countries are based on firm friendship, historical closeness and solidarity between people. Brnabic said that full membership in the European Union is strategic priority for Serbia which appreciates the unquestionable support of Cyprus to its European integration, the Serbian government said in a statement.

Prime Minister Ana Brnabic met on May 16 in Belgrade with delegation of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China. During the meeting, Brnabic said that political relations of the two countries have reached the highest point of development in their history through a high level of cooperation in all areas. Brnabic described relations of the two countries as a comprehensive strategic partnership, saying that the People’s Republic of China is a friendly country and the most important economic partner on the Asian continent, the Serbian government announced after the meeting.

On May 30, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic spoke with the Ghanaian Parliament Speaker Aaron Mike Oquaye about improving relations between the

two countries through economic and cultural cooperation, it was announced by the Prime Minister's office.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic visited several South-Asian countries in the beginning of May, more precisely – India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. On May 3, Ivica Dacic met with Sushma Swaraj, Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India. On this occasion, two ministers expressed mutual pleasure with the decades-long traditional friendly relations and understanding between the two countries, particularly in the year of celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. On May 6, Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic reiterated his gratitude towards the government of Nepal for supporting the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. Dacic informed Nepal Prime Minister Sharma Oli about the current situation in the Southern province and the exceptional importance that Kosovo and Metohija has for Serbia. Oli expressed the strong opposition of Nepal to separatism, and pointed out that relations with Serbia were very good and friendly. On May 7 in Colombo, Minister Dacic and the Speaker of Sri Lankan Parliament Karu Jayasuriya discussed possibilities for improving the bilateral relations, particularly parliamentary cooperation. Dacic thanked Jayasuriya for his country's refusal to support an independent "Kosovo", hoping it would maintain their view in the future. Prior to this meeting, The Serbian Foreign Minister had met with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. After this series of visits, the Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic summed up that Serbia could count on "three sure votes in favor of its territorial integrity and sovereignty."

Minister Dacic also met with his Cypriot counterpart, Nicos Christodoulides on May 10 in Belgrade. Christodoulides repeated the Cyprus' position regarding the non-recognition of "Kosovo's" independence.

Of great value for Serbia was the Serbian Foreign Minister's statement at a meeting of the Security Council of the United Nations devoted to the work of UNMIK. Minister Dacic called for the format of the Council's sessions on

Kosovo to remain the same, as opposed to the demands from the West. He said at the session in New York that Serbia was committed to resolving all issues through the dialogue, saying that Serbia had demonstrated “admirable political maturity and credibility” over the past years. He also accused Pristina of having failed to fulfill its obligations.

As well as Minister Dacic, international meetings were attended by other ministers of the Serbian government – Minister of Defense Aleksandar Vulin, Minister of Justice Nela Kuburovic and Minister of Construction, Transportation and Infrastructure, Zorana Mihajlovic.

Except these activities it is also important to mention the gathering of the 12<sup>th</sup> Balkan Chiefs of Defense Conference. Representatives from Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, The Republic of Macedonia and Albania participated in the conference held in Belgrade.

### **Conclusion**

The senior officials of the Republic of Serbia concluded numerous visits and meetings with the highest foreign government officials in the month of May, 2018. Although Serbia remains committed to the EU integration process, it also develops strong ties and partnerships with the EU non-member countries, as well with the countries that are in serious political conflicts with the EU (i.e. Russia or Turkey). Serbia also remained engaged in an active communication with Asian countries, which was demonstrated during the month of May, in order to seek support in its position towards repudiation of “Kosovo’s” unilateral secession. Hereby presented policy is an example of flexible and pragmatic use of foreign policy, maneuvered and limited between expressing the will of becoming one of the EU member states and refusing “Kosovo’s” independence (the latter would be gladly accepted and supported by the majority of the EU member states). On the other hand, in order to keep as much of maneuver space as possible, Serbia actively cooperates with the Russian

Federation, China and, to a lesser extent, India both on political and economic grounds, as well as on the grounds of military-technical cooperation (especially with Russia). All the meetings mentioned above had in their function maintenance and extension of Serbia's current foreign policy. It can be expected that in the next period, Serbian high state representatives will take part in vivid diplomatic activities with focus set on topics such as: the status of Kosovo and Metohija and a dialogue with Pristina, the EU integration process, bilateral relations with countries (the representatives of which will meet with Serbian officials). Keeping this in mind, it is highly possible that the Serbian diplomatic circles will have lots of activities, and officials of the Republic of Serbia will have lots of important meetings and conversations with foreign high state officials. This kind of conclusion can also be reached through the Serbian national leadership's determination that the main "weapon" of protection and improvement of national interests is a stable and constructive dialogue.