

The Conference titled “Serbia with strong allies or neutral”

Ian Vulkovsky, Embassy of Czech Republic

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for their kind invitation to this highly significant meeting. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ian Vulkovsky and I work in the Political Office of the Embassy of Czech Republic in the Republic of Serbia. As some of you may know, in addition to chairing the European Union during this half-term, Czech Republic has also become the so-called NATO contact Embassy this January with a two-year term of office.

There have been NATO contact Embassies before us in Serbia – that function was performed by Great Britain, Norway, Italy, and now we have taken over the office.

As Prof. Dragisic has already said, all the experiences of the Czech Republic in Euro-Atlantic integrations are at the disposal and they are used in some of our official contacts with the authorities in Serbia in relation to the Ministry of Interior and in relation to the Ministry of Defence.

If the question was raised here about the experience of Czech Republic related to its accession to NATO, I have to say that after the democratic changes that happened in our country in 1989 when we threw away the communism and accepted democratic principles in our society, there was no doubt at all about our commitment to join those organisations, which means the European Union and NATO, to which we would have belonged anyway if it had not been for four decades of communist dictatorship and dictatorship of the Soviet Union, namely Moscow.

Thus, we understood it as our return to Europe, to democratic Europe the members of which we were, for example, before the World War II. There was no doubt about it at a political level either. There was a wide consensus at a political level that, as Prof. Dragisic has also said, the state does not lose its sovereignty but even enhances its sovereignty by entering NATO.

There was no referendum about this issue in our country because a wide public support enabled the Government to decide about accession into NATO itself.

However, we did organise the referendum related to our accession into the European Union. European Union is specific as some decisions are made there and even if your country is in minority some decisions may be made that your country opposes.

If we talk about NATO we had no doubts at all if we should join this most powerful organisation and re-join the allies that we used to be with before.

I am often asked here in Serbia about financial issues – what will Serbia get if it joins NATO? I have to say that it is very difficult to express it in figures. Naturally, there are foreign investments that start coming in as the country becomes stable, respectable and credible for foreign investments.

There are also certain military infrastructural projects for which the state is getting financial resources from the NATO budget.

If we talk about benefits from being the member of NATO we have to understand it in some kind of general and very wide sense as enhancement of sovereignty, as association within the most powerful circle on this planet in

security sense. This is how we understood our membership.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the organisers once again for providing me the opportunity to represent the Embassy of the Czech Republic at this meeting as NATO contact Embassy in the Republic of Serbia.

I wish you a pleasant day.