

STATEMENT
OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

IVICA DACIC

On the occasion of the Armistice Day in connection with the presentation of the research study
“Serbian WWI soldiers who died in the territory of the Kingdom of the Netherlands”

Museum of Serbian Diplomacy, 2 November 2017

Dear descendants of the people we honor today,

Esteemed Ambassador Van den Dool,

Excellencies and Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even one hundred years after the end of the first Great War in the history of mankind, Europe and the world at large are still committed to remembering its victims and maintaining a dignified memory of their sacrifice.

European security has been a subject of debates for centuries.

As soon as the cannon of war would fall silent, a virtual fireworks of ideas and projects would explode. Due to the fact that in the 20th century both World Wars erupted on the European soil, Europe was referred to by many as the world's fateful continent. That is why a stable Europe is a guarantor of stability and culture of peace in the world and all of us living on the European continent are committed to this goal in an ever more uniting Europe.

Serbia remembers full well that from the very outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and humanitarian catastrophe that engulfed Serbia, heroes emerged as true knights of chivalry and courage. In its wake, the war also created sufferers and victims. And then, there was a new breed of unarmed war heroes guided by a new idea – one of humanity.

That war gave birth to heroes and heroines of humanity and generosity which know no bounds and do not divide people along national, religious and political lines. Most of medical missions and prominent individuals who selflessly helped Serbian people came from the Western countries but from others as well. These people belonged to the intellectual elites and avant-garde circles in their countries – first women doctors, first forensic specialists, volunteers who braved the front-lines along with Serbs, fighting shoulder to shoulder even though they did not have to. Still, it was their decision and choice. One of those remarkable man was Dr. Arius van Tienhoven of the Netherlands, a true hero of the Valjevo hospital.

In the face of attempts to rewrite history persistently emanating from one part of the international community, it is necessary to maintain the “culture of remembrance” and invoke immeasurable sacrifice of some nations whose people died for civilizational values of entire mankind. Serbian people has always been in the forefront of those who paid a heavy price in human lives. In the Great War one third of its population perished. Almost one in ten individuals who died in the Great War was a Serb. Serbia experienced a demographic catastrophe from which it never recovered.

For daily political ends, attempts are often made at altering historiographic facts, by using an alternative approach to relativize them through sophistry, thus establishing a certain discourse, a deceptive idea of the plurality of truth, by which political interests, sadly, often blatantly disregard scientific methodology for researching foreign relations-related phenomena and processes, particularly insofar as the number of victims. However, historical distance makes possible an objective approach in understanding the phenomena and the revisionist image conjured up by daily politics is untenable when faced with facts.

Today, only days before the Armistice Day, we have gathered here in the Museum of Serbian Diplomacy, wearing a ramonda nathaliae on our lapels, on a kind of Remembrance Day of Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands during World War I, as well as Arius van Tienhoven who provided medical assistance to Serbs, as well as all others who offered selfless help to Serbia in surviving the Cavalry of the Great War.

In this regard, allow me, on my behalf and on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, to express gratitude to the authors and the Netherlands Embassy in Belgrade for their valuable contribution, and in particular the researchers Tatjana and Fabian Vendrig, and John Stienen who invested great efforts to trace information on the Serbs who died in the Netherlands. To a SERBIA THAT REMEMBERS, it is important that the NETHERLANDS RECALLS the Serbian victims of World War I and that it looks after the legacy of Serbian sufferers, not letting them fall into oblivion even 100 years later.

Fostering the “remembrance culture” for the sake of the culture of peace – yesterday, today and tomorrow – is the source of moral sense and collective awareness which keeps the flames of the humankind burning.

The history of our civilization is sadly one of armed conflicts and wars. Researchers and scientists from the whole world have put together an Encyclopedia of Peace, noting that since the year 3200 B.C. as many as 14,560 wars were waged, resulting in more than 3 billion citizens losing their lives to this day.

On Armistice Day, each 11 November, as well as on Europe Day and Victory Day celebrating the defeat of Fascism we show our support to the human aspiration to the ideal of the “culture of peace” and the fostering of the “culture of remembrance”, for these are the jewels of humanity, representing the ever-lasting light of core values of life.

Daily politics pursued by interest groups is an ephemeral phenomenon which may mislead peoples, turning them against each other, but can never win.

The global geopolitical situation is ever-changing, so is the constellation of power. This very constellation of military and political power determines the conduct of states. Whether the peace will prevail or not, depends on the platform around which coalitions are formed.

Serbia, which made immeasurable sacrifices for the civilizational values of freedom and peace of mankind, has since ancient times to this day, through “the culture of remembrance”, affirmed its commitment to peace, for there is no such thing as a path towards peace – and peace itself is the only path possible.