

Bosnia and Herzegovina's National Treasure

Check Against Delivery

***Speech by High Representative Valentin Inzko
At the Opening of International Tourism days
Sarajevo, May 8, 2014***

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here – particularly as today's event launches an initiative in one of the most dynamic and successful sectors of the BiH economy. For many years now, the tourism sector has shown – in terms of job creation, investment and consumer satisfaction – the enormous potential of this economy and of the country as a whole.

Yet it is clear that the industry can be even *more* successful. It is also clear that the success it has achieved can be duplicated in the rest of the economy. It can, for that matter, be duplicated in other spheres of national life including the political sphere.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has only scratched the surface when it comes to creating tourism jobs and using tourism as a path to prosperity. In Europe, tourism accounts for more than 45 million jobs. That's around 14 percent of all employment opportunities. In this country, less than three percent of jobs are in tourism.

There are two ways of looking at this.

The first is negative: Bosnia and Herzegovina is far below the European average when it comes to transforming tourism resources into employment opportunities.

But the second way of looking at it is positive: there is huge scope for development.

Tourism can be a major engine – perhaps even *the* major engine – of BiH economic growth. It can create tens of thousands of new jobs and it can spearhead the battle against poverty.

That's what tourism *can* do and with the right political and strategic direction that's what tourism *will* do.

All of us in this room are well aware of the country's competitive strengths in this sector: topographical diversity, extraordinary cultural heritage, proximity to a vast pool of potential visitors, and almost limitless opportunities for developing adventure tourism, historical tourism, spa tourism, religious tourism, and rural tourism.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has it all.

And it has one additional and priceless asset – its long and celebrated culture of hospitality.

Bosnia and Herzegovina truly is a place where visitors make friends.

There is a fund of travellers' tales about BiH hoteliers, tour guides, taxi drivers, shopkeepers and others who have stepped up from the basic obligations of professional courtesy to extend genuine kindness to visitors.

In recent years Bosnia and Herzegovina has been depressingly mired at the bottom end of the World Bank's Global Competitiveness Report, so it's particularly refreshing that the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report last year put the country at the opposite end of the international rankings. Bosnia and Herzegovina came eighth out of 140 countries surveyed in the category dealing with the attitude of the population towards foreign visitors. In the same survey it was among the top 20 global destinations in terms of the competitiveness of its natural environment.

This is not simply an unsung national treasure: it's a unique platform on which an entire industry can be developed.

However, although visitor numbers and tourism revenue have been rising, the sector is not yet developing at an exponential rate.

This can be attributed to key political and economic challenges.

We are all well aware of the acute limitations of Bosnia and Herzegovina's transport network. This affects tourism particularly badly: getting visitors from airports to hotels and then from one tourism attraction to another can be a major undertaking, often time-consuming and expensive.

If we look at the tourism sector we see many of the problems and many of the opportunities that exist in the broader social and economic spheres. There is not enough strategic planning, not enough dynamic implementation, not enough investment and job creation – but there is an infinite capacity to respond in a positive way and achieve tremendous results when dynamic and imaginative strategies are adopted.

There are problems but they can be solved; there are opportunities and they can be seized.

The prospects for BiH tourism – like the prospects for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole – are very good indeed.

Thank you