

Remarks at Reopening of Brcko Port Facilities By the Brcko Supervisor Henry L. Clarke

It is really a pleasure to be here today, and to thank the Government of Italy, the port personnel, and all those people who have worked to restore the cranes, railway tracks and other facilities for the port of Brcko. This is certainly an important moment in the reconstruction of the infrastructure of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is so important because this is a vital step in a much larger, strategic effort to restore commercial navigation on the Sava River. This is not just a step forward for the future of Brcko. This is a step toward the lowering of transport costs for bulk commodities for a large part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Yugoslavia. It is a step toward restoring – I would prefer to say, toward expanding – the commercial and transport links in the entire Sava River Basin with all of Europe, through the Danube River system.

Economists and diplomats have talked a lot about how Bosnia and its neighbors can somehow become more a part of the rest of Europe. Much of the discussion has sounded very theoretical, even problematic. But here, before our eyes, is something very practical that we can do, something that has worked before, and it can work again. We can directly improve the transport of goods between Bosnia and much of Europe. It is not just a question of traffic that existed ten or more years ago. I am talking about new trade, creating opportunities for new industries that did not exist before. In the last few months, I have heard of at least two completely new business proposals that can only be implemented if the Sava River is reopened to normal traffic. Bosnia and Herzegovina should not lose these investments!

Croatia has done an extensive survey of its portion of the river bottom. My office already offered to fund a bathymetric survey for part of the river, and we are now changing that project to cover parts of the river between here and a portion of the river within Yugoslavia. This will include a section of the river downstream from the confluence with the Drina, where dredging is most important. But there is a lot more technical work to be done and some of it is expensive. It is needed now.

Restoring navigation cannot be done by Bosnia, or any one country, acting alone. The river is shared by four countries and controlled by three countries, and work by any country alone will be incomplete until the others do their part. The transport companies need to know what has been agreed among the countries to operate safely and efficiently. In international relations, nothing happens without hard work. Bosnia, and each of the other countries, must take this opportunity for working with its neighbors seriously.

At my invitation we have had two international meetings on this question in Brcko, involving the three countries that control the navigable portion of the Sava. The second meeting also included a representative from Slovenia, which could also benefit from lower transport costs. Bosnia, Croatia and Yugoslavia have prepared specific requests for funding, which we hope to present jointly to the Stability Pact in Bucharest next week. It is essential that we show the Stability Pact countries, and potential donors, that these countries are prepared to work closely together.

This is no time for political quibbling, or worrying about which side will benefit the most. Nobody will benefit until everyone has a chance to benefit. This is about creating jobs in the whole Sava Basin. This is about giving cheaper and better transport between the interior of these countries and the rest of Europe.

That is why this port improvement is so important. It is an investment of money and human effort into a much larger strategic goal that will have great political and economic benefit to this region. The need for jobs is urgent. There is no time to waste in completing what has already begun – here in Brcko and elsewhere along the River Sava.