

Opening remarks of the Brcko Supervisor, Henry L. Clarke, at press conference in Brcko on August 8, 2001

Nobody enjoys paying taxes. Politicians do their best to avoid imposing taxes on people who might vote for them. Collecting taxes is not an easy job. Yet we also want government services, and such services require taxes.

If each person, and each business, pays his or her fair share, taxes can be kept to a reasonable level. This is, unfortunately, not the practice throughout much of Bosnia and Herzegovina: some taxes are too high for legitimate business, and other people who should pay taxes do not pay at all. In Brcko we would like to have lower tax rates, but we are seeking full payment by everyone. Therefore I want to call your attention to a very important initiative of the Brcko District Government. You may have heard of it, but I don't want it to be lost during this August vacation period.

The District Revenue Agency has declared an amnesty for those who have not registered their business or their employees for tax purposes. Such persons have until August 31 to register, and if they do so, they will not pay penalties. If they do not register this month, then after September 1 they will be subject to enforcement of the tax laws, including penalties. Business people who want to avoid such penalties should contact the District Revenue Agency right away, and in any case before August 31.

I commend the District Government for this initiative, which can help bring about greater justice among taxpayers. I also commend members of the District Government, and Mayor Kisic,

for their leadership in declaring and paying their own taxes. These measures will help people to increase confidence in their government, and make it easier for others to comply with the law.

Two weeks ago, on July 25, I expressed my deep concern that the Republika Srpska had privatized at least two companies in Brcko District without consultations with us. Since then, we have learned that they had begun legal measures to privatize the Revena Hotel, which is one of the "strategic" companies that Brcko District intended to privatize. It was done without consultation, without the opportunity for Brcko residents to participate, and in conflict with what we thought was an agreement not to do so. Clearly the RS, like the Federation, does not consider itself bound by that agreement, so there is no agreement. Because the RS Privatization Agency was not candid with us, we do not know what else they may have privatized. In order to protect the interests of the people of Brcko in this public property, I will be taking the necessary legal steps to stop all RS privatization in Brcko District. As I said last week, I feel privatization is a very important part of rebuilding the economy of Brcko District, and we will proceed with this process as soon as possible.

We have received bids on a tender to construct two school buildings in downtown Brcko, on the site of the former VRS barracks. I mentioned this on Monday when we visited the Brcko Gymnasium. If you will have a look at these drawings you will see what we are planning to do.