

Remarks by Deputy High Representative Patrice Dreiski at a Ceremony to Mark the State Veterinary Office's Assumption of Responsibility for Border Inspections

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's ceremony is a major step forward in establishing a reliable veterinary system as a core element in a coherent BiH trade policy.

This is a prerequisite for tackling the balance of payments deficit (and a commitment given by the authorities as part of the government's Action Plan)

Establishing efficient, European-standard border animal health inspections is also a core element in ensuring food safety.

Which means that today's event may be viewed as a boost for the BiH economy and as a boost for BiH consumers.

Till now, BiH's animal inspection system has been fractured and disorganised. The result – an epidemiological situation in which the transmission of disease from animals to humans is scandalously high.

From today, personnel and equipment at border posts that have hitherto been the responsibility of the Entity Agriculture Ministries will come under the responsibility of the BiH Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations. This will give BiH a unified animal inspection system that can effectively protect consumers and prevent or eradicate

disease. This kind of system is standard in most other countries.

In addition to the clear physical danger created by the former system, it acted as a major deterrent to investment in the BiH farm sector.

So now that we have a modern and rational inspection system in place we can set about

- ensuring food security in BiH,
- ensuring that the transmission of disease from animals to humans is controlled,
- ensuring that farm exports can start earning desperately needed foreign exchange, and
- ensuring that appropriate levels of foreign and domestic investment start flowing into the BiH farm sector in order to create jobs.

This is why today's event is so important.

Of course, for all of this to happen much more has to be done.

- A system of authorised laboratories must be established.
- Data from these laboratories must be exchanged efficiently and speedily.
- A BiH Veterinary Chamber and Veterinary Council must be established.
- EU recommendations in the agriculture sector must be implemented.
- Reforms in plant health protection and food safety must be implemented in order to capitalise on the reforms that have now been implemented in the veterinary sector.

I believe that today's event may come to be seen as a turning point. Food safety is a basic requirement that citizens are entitled to expect their government to provide. Until now the authorities in BiH have been unable to guarantee food safety. From now on, they will have the basic mechanisms in place to

start addressing this issue. Today is a beginning. A great deal still has to be done, but it's a promising beginning and the authorities are to be congratulated, despite long and avoidable delays, for getting to this point. We encourage them to move further and faster in the future.

Thank you