

Speech by the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák at the Srebrenica Investment Conference



Srebrenica: Market-Based Recovery

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There will be presentations this morning highlighting key competitive advantages that the Srebrenica area can offer prospective investors and then this afternoon there will be meetings between prospective investors and prospective partners from the private sector and from the domestic authorities and international agencies. We want to facilitate, support and promote this process of engagement so that it starts to produce investment and new jobs over the medium and long term.

This morning's presentations will shed light on the significant and as yet untapped economic potential of the Srebrenica area. Shedding light is a necessary first step. Once investment possibilities have been identified they can be publicised, beyond Srebrenica and beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Let me emphasise that no one will be trying to pretend that some things are wonderful when they aren't, or trying to spin negative circumstances into positive ones. The object of today's exercise is to pinpoint and publicise the Srebrenica area's real competitive economic advantages, in terms of location, labour availability, natural resources and infrastructure – and this will be done in a rigorous and transparent way. Our broader object is to turn these competitive advantages into new jobs in Srebrenica; this can only be done on the basis of accurate information.

Commercial Criteria

Today's discussions will be based on commercial criteria. Srebrenica is different; what happened there twelve years ago was devastating, for the municipality, the country and the world. But this fact does not diminish the paramount need to pursue a policy of market-based economic development. In fact it increases the urgency of implementing such a policy. Restoring Srebrenica to life after the horror of 1995 is a moral obligation, and it is an important way of showing respect for those who were murdered and showing solidarity with those who were bereaved. But this restoration will only succeed if we apply lessons of market-based sustainable development that have been learned elsewhere.

Three weeks ago, as most of you will know, the three prime ministers, along with the Mayor of Brcko, signed a Platform for Action committing themselves to cooperate on a broad range of economic initiatives. They did this because – as they stated in their preamble – they understand that urgent economic reforms cannot be put on hold until major political disputes have been resolved; they understand too that attracting investment, creating employment and raising living standards represent their most important challenge. They stressed that they are now committed to making economic growth the key objective of their administrations.

The active participation of senior representatives of the State and Entity authorities in today's conference demonstrates a high level of political commitment to securing more investment in Srebrenica. This commitment will help to deliver positive economic benefits to the people of the municipality and the people of Northeast Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

I believe that today's conference points the way to a model of investment attraction and job creation that can be applied beyond Srebrenica. Many municipalities are still severely handicapped because they do not have access to basic development tools – or because they do not have the necessary expertise to make use of these tools effectively. The brochure that has been prepared for today's conference provides a clear picture of the Srebrenica economy – its weaknesses and its strengths, its investment opportunities and its competitive advantages; it also brings together the sort of information that investors need – testimonials from companies that have already set up shop in the municipality, and contact details for the State and Entity agencies and municipal departments that investors can or must deal with. This is the type of approach that municipalities everywhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be taking.

Municipal staff should be able to answer the following questions in a positive way – is there someone in your municipality assigned to deal with domestic and or international investors? If a prospective investor contacts the municipality in English or German or Russian or another foreign language do you have someone who can respond in the same language? Can you list the websites where investment opportunities in your municipality are publicized?

The plain fact of the matter is that a municipality may have remarkable investment opportunities – but if investors do not know about these opportunities and cannot easily find out about them, such opportunities cannot be turned into new jobs.

I hope that this conference will build effectively on work that has already been done to rebuild the infrastructure of Srebrenica and the surrounding area, improve the local business environment and speed up the pace of economic recovery, and that development models successfully applied in Srebrenica can be applied in other municipalities.

Thank you