

**Nagovor predsednice vlade mag. Alenke Bratušek na donatorski konferenci
»Obnavljajmo skupaj«**

Bruselj, 16. julij 2014

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to **sincerely and most warmly thank you all for gathering here today**. The fact that so many of you responded in such a short time proves that we are all aware that the nature can struck anytime and anywhere and that we must always be able **to count on each other's help and support**.

Let me try to explain why a donor conference is needed and why we have proposed to organise it.

This past May, more than a million people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia were affected by the largest flood in the last 120 years. **It claimed many lives, wiped entire villages and towns off the map, destroyed infrastructure and displaced minefields**. Hundred and twenty thousand remaining landmines obtained a whole new dimension after the recent floods. Great masses of water, mud and landslides caused many of the mines to move. They were flushed away from the known positions - in worst case also back into the already cleared areas.

Almost one million people had to leave their homes and many of them were left with nothing. Homes, schools, hospitals were destroyed; the greatest economic loss was in agriculture, transport and energy infrastructure.

The needs on the ground are overwhelming and the reconstruction will require extensive funds. **This natural disaster struck at a time when the two countries were struggling with the consequences of the economic and financial crisis** and have limited funding to cope with the extensive damages.

The focus on humanitarian aid that we have all provided immediately must now shift towards the **reconstruction and development**. We have to act now, so that restoration can begin in the summer months – so that agricultural production is restored; so that a new school year can start; and so that people have much needed accommodation before the winter. **If all this is not provided the natural disaster might escalate into a social catastrophe**.

All this is a reason why holding a donor conference was proposed. It is the fastest and most effective method for collecting at least some of the financial assistance required. For the first time such an event is being organised for two countries together: **in the Western Balkans this has an important meaning**.

Slovenia has shared part of its history with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; moreover, **we have positive political relations, intensive economic cooperation, many cultural exchanges and, most importantly, close and friendly people-to-people ties**.

Solidarity has once again proven to be an important feature of our relations, as we have witnessed in the past couple of months, when the Slovenian people, on their own initiative, selflessly offered their help. Highly successful campaigns to collect food, clothes and money were launched all over the country and many convoys with humanitarian aid travelled to the affected areas. Slovenia also provided civil protection teams, water pumps, boats and helicopters.

However, I have to stress something extremely important. Neither Slovenia nor other countries or institutions that have offered immediate assistance must allow ourselves **to think that we have done enough**. Help provided so far was unfortunately only a tiny fraction of the much needed response.

It should also be pointed out that the conference is aimed not only at collecting funds to reduce the damage of the flooding, but also at promoting all-inclusive regional cooperation, which would encourage effective disaster prevention and response in the entire region.

Since meteorological disasters have become increasingly frequent and intense, a **concept of comprehensive response to this threat is needed**. It is necessary to take a coordinated approach to the implementation of all known measures that could reduce or prevent the threat of natural disasters (for people, infrastructure, the economy, the environment or cultural heritage).

The concept involves 4 essential phases, well-known to the experts: **prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery**. Furthermore, the concept should involve regular education of all those involved and at risk.

This is what was missing in the case of recent floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and will need to be adequately dealt with in the future. It is of great importance that flood recovery is managed at the regional level, as rivers not only cross their banks but also cross borders.

Investment into prevention and respecting the 'building back better' principle must be respected all along the recovery and reconstruction phase. **If not all efforts and financial means invested in recovery might be lost in possible future floods.**

To conclude,

We are very much aware that transparency, responsiveness and accountability in managing the donated money must be ensured. This is why the European Commission will ensure the necessary overview **and I would like to thank the European Commission for that.**

We would like to inform you that Slovenia is taking over the chairmanship of the International Sava River Basin Commission, which is also among Donor Conference participants. **One of the future priorities of the Commission will be the improvement of cross-border notification.**

Ministers, respective guests, ladies and gentlemen,

When thinking about today's event, **trust, respect, and solidarity** are the words that come to mind – all these are values which we have to channel to our mutual benefit and into a positive experience.

I strongly believe this will be a positive experience and would like to thank everyone who showed solidarity with people in Bosnia and Hercegovina and Serbia.

Thank you.