



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**Štefan Füle**

European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

## **Croatia - Bosnia and Hetzegovina: Agreements on border management signed**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Signature ceremony of Agreements between Croatia - Bosnia and Hetzegovina, Brussels  
**19 June 2013**

I welcome the Chair of the Council of Ministers Bevanda, Deputy Prime Minister Pusić and Minister Lagumdžija and their delegations.

The conclusion of the 3 bilateral agreements is a historical milestone in the EU integration process of the Western Balkans.

In less than 2 weeks, the EU will be the direct neighbour of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country should benefit even more from the EU, now that it is so close. The common market of the EU with more than 500 million inhabitants will be at the doorstep of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This means great opportunities for all citizens and for the economy of the country.

The agreements that are concluded today will help to considerably facilitate the day-to-day management of the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is between the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They will grant political and legal certainty, which is necessary for smooth border control and the crossing by persons and of goods.

Croatia will have to implement the EU rules on border controls, on customs, on transit traffic and with regard to food-safety, veterinary and phytosanitary issues. The 3 agreements create a good basis for this to happen in accordance with our rules and our high standards, while not leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina outside.

Let me briefly explain what this is about:

- Firstly: the Agreement on Border Crossing Points does not only fix the places of border crossing points on the longest border in the Western Balkans of more than 1,000 km. The agreement is also in full compliance with the EU requirements regarding border controls of persons and of goods. It will facilitate the exchange of goods of Croatia and the EU with Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Secondly: The Local Border Traffic Agreement will allow citizens living in an area of 5 km or less from the joint State border to cross it under easier conditions than in the case of normal crossings. Beneficiaries are in particular farmers, families with ties on both sides of the border and economic actors operating mostly in that area. The agreement provides for a revision clause to extend the border area to up to 30 km. The parties could thus decide on enlarging the number of beneficiaries of the simplified procedures in the future.

I wish to congratulate both countries for all their efforts to timely construct the necessary infrastructure, such as the Border Inspection Points established by Croatia or the access road on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the new Border Crossing Point at Bijača close to Čapljina/Metković.

Once Bosnia and Herzegovina is entitled to export agricultural products of animal origin to the EU, including Croatia, an additional Crossing Point at Isačić / Ličko Petrovo close to Bihać can be prepared for such exports. This relates in particular to milk and milk products.

Bosnia and Herzegovina can do more and should transpose the related EU laws in this sector and set up EU compatible control structures for such products. I call today on all political leaders and the heads of governments and administrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina to work with unified determination on this task.

The Joint Interpretative Note on the Neum/Ploče Agreement ensures smooth transit traffic through the Neum-corridor. I welcome the readiness of the administrations of both countries to carry out the necessary controls of the borders of this corridor of less than 10 km in thorough cooperation.

At the same time, the EU has been able to grant Bosnia and Herzegovina a special transit regime for the export of agricultural products of animal origin from Bosnia and

Herzegovina to third countries through the port of Ploče. Such derogations are extremely rare. They will allow the country to continue to use the Port of Ploče in Croatia for its agri-food sector.

This means that, on the one hand, the transit of EU citizens through the Neum-corridor will be facilitated and on the other, Bosnia and Herzegovina will be granted the right to continue using the Port of Ploče for the export of agricultural products of animal origin to third countries.

Here, let me please pass the floor to Tonio Borg, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy.

Let me please address the last topic: The trade regime of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the EU needs to be adapted to take into account that Croatia is becoming the 28th member of the EU on 1 July.

I invite Bosnia and Herzegovina to resume the negotiations with the Commission to conclude a Trade related Protocol to adapt the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The next round of these negotiations have been called by the Commission for 25 June.

Here, let me return to the issue of accreditation I already mentioned. I would like to appeal on Bosnia and Herzegovina to speed up activities in order to achieve the EU accreditation for the export of agricultural products of animal origin to the European Union. The administrative control structures have to comply with the EU Food safety standards. An effective chain of control and command therefore needs to be established at the level of state, entities and cantons.

Croatia will be the 28th EU Member State and it has shown the path a country needs to follow to become a Member of the EU. I am convinced that the political leaders, the economy, employers, trade unions and NGOs of Croatia are more than willing to help Bosnia and Herzegovina on its own way to Europe. In the meantime, Bosnia and Herzegovina will start benefitting from the EU as its new neighbour.

In only couple of days the borders of the EU are going to move, are going to change. The EU is going to be bigger but also stronger because Croatia is going to become the 28th Member State. It was a well prepared candidate that underwent an unprecedented accession negotiations as far as the complexity and as far as the focus on the credibility of that process, very often being asked to deliver on the track record and not only on the ticking boxes – to see whether this or that has been adopted.

Our task has been to make stronger not only the EU but also the immediate neighbourhood and to have stronger connections with our neighbours. It was not an easy task at the beginning when we had our first Trilateral meeting, I remember our "to do" list getting bigger and bigger, but I think we have been able to deliver on the expectations because what we had in our focus since the very beginning was the comfort and the well-being of the people living in the region. And it was for them that we have done everything to turn this new border between the EU and the rest of Western Balkans into an opportunity that I hope is going to be used not only by Bosnia and Herzegovina but also by some other countries in the region.

So, many thanks to all of you, many thanks for being flexible and keeping that goal in mind all the time.

Here we are, thank you very much, it is your day, it is a day of a strong Europe, and very soon of the European Union with 28 Member States.