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Guten Tag!

Das ist sehr erstaunlich, ich wusste nicht, dass Sie serbisch oder kroatisch sprechen können. Aber ich kann nicht deutsch sprechen. Wir haben das ein bisschen gemacht, aber nächstes Jahr werde ich in Deutsch sprechen, aber es ist ein bisschen zu gefährlich, um mein Land und für diese Donau-Strategie für mich ... deutsch sprechen und ich werde jetzt in englisch sprechen. Ich hoffe, dass Sie das verstehen werden.

Dear friends,

thank you very much for this kind invitation. It's an important thing to keep the traditions and I think the fact that here you are in the 15th edition of this Forum shows that Austria even though there are ups and downs is very well committed to the European Agenda, there will be other ups and downs and definitely the current crises is putting everybody and every single project under a lot of stress.

Let's face it. This Danube Strategy when Austria – of course with Rumania as a new member state – has proposed to the European Commission to establish a Danube Strategy that was done under different circumstances. The circumstances have changed but on the other hand the opportunity of building a Danube Strategy has not.

There are only two great rivers in Europe, which go to many states: the Rhine and the Danube. And still to these days the Danube is carrying ten times less goods than the Rhine and is three times more polluted than the Rhine. Of course, that is an overall reflection of the strength of the States around the Rhine than of the Danube. But it also demonstrates that under current circumstances one can definitely see the Danube Strategy as one of

the tools of the European Union of the European Continent to address the current economic crises.

Indeed, if I may, the first suggestion would be to really tie very strongly and we discussed with the Austrian national coordinator, Rumanian, Hungarian, many, as well as with the European Commission at the latest meeting in Constanza after the Danube Strategy Conference that closed the cycle started in Ulm in February this year, there is a need to make sure that the Danube Strategy is seen by the entire European Union as one of the answers to the crises.

Therefore, we need to demonstrate in the text in the actual plan in the projects on how the Danube Strategy will be permitting Europe to come out of the crises through the Danube. This is the first and the last macro-regional strategy for countries such as Austria, but also for sure Serbia and it is therefore very important that we do not lose this chance and that we will do best by demonstrating also to our British friends, our Swedish friends, our Spanish friends, what is it for them to gain in building together the Danube Strategy.

Of course, we in Serbia are very happy to have been included but we believe that it should be a very ... strategy to be successful.

The second point, of course, is that we need to have as many as possible flagship-projects, projects that demonstrate that now rather than dividing the Danube is uniting. When Croatia entered the European Union and this is something that Serbia strongly supports, we hope that this will happen in 2012 at the latest, 11 if possible, from then point on the Danube will leave the European Union in Croatia and then enter Serbia to reenter the European Union in Rumania and Bulgaria.

It shows that with the 588 km of the Danube that flows through Serbia, actually a pretty standing 25 % per cent of the navigable part of the Danube we needed to be integrated. This is why we have immediately started to see with our neighbours and other European partners what we can be doing in terms of win-win. So, yes, I came back from California, there is a couple of sentences like this that stick to you, when you come back from

the States, win-win-solutions, whereby as Mrs. Mueller of the European Minister from Bavaria said, projects and money should not only flow down the Danube, they should also flow up the Danube and that is true, that is true, and we will all more of the Southern and Eastern part be very well advised to ponder on this deep sentence. This is not the time when somebody can expect billions of Euros to pop up out of sheer generosity. Those are difficult times for net-contributing states such as Austria or Germany and when one talks about projects one really has to check whether those are projects where there is a common winner for all parties involved.

That's why e. g. in Serbia we have three or four large projects, one is in order to build an intramodal node because in Belgrade and in Novisad we have the corridor 10 rail/road crossing with the Danube the corridor 7. We do not have the infrastructure to be then there and colleagues from Austria e. g. have come and visit, there is ample opportunity to join-venture in some special purpose vehicles in order to build a very important infra-structural point.

We have benefits for all involved. The second has to do with ecology. I am not too proud to tell you that all waste water from Belgrade flows back to be Danube. Just like this, directly. And, of course, we don't want it that way, but between the idea of having clean water sent by the Belgrades back to the Danube and now there is a need of 600 million Euro worth of investment.

Here, if I talk about financing, that's my third point, one needs to be realistic but also ambitious. Definitely some countries such as Serbia that has a relatively low indebtedness, our foreign debt, sovereign debt, is only 32 % of GDP do have some space in the balance sheet to take on sovereign debt in order to effect some of the projects on the Danube.

These things said those capacities are not enormous. They are even smaller in countries that have a higher indebtedness. As a matter of fact the current debate in Europe is to reduce the deficits if anything at all and understood from the final report this year in Austria that next week in Austria there will be debate between the central and regional governments or who is to bear the grant. This is the reality of these times.

Therefore what is very important is to be innovative. Innovative by recognizing that we will need to mobilize the existing resources, from structural funds and pre-accession funds in the current financial cycle of the European Union up until the end of 2013. For instance Serbia we allocated already 35 million Euro from the modest resources we get and we already decided in order to make us more absorptive for the next round to allocate the further 20 million Euro from the EPA 2011. Money in need above all to prepare the projects, because quite often people say we have needs but then they don't have the real project. They say we need to act fast but they did not take the pain to do all the environmental, logistical and other impact studies so as to make those projects fundable.

I believe that at the time of the adopting of the Hungarian presidency of the Danube Strategy it will be a good time to focus our efforts in 2011 throughout the 13 to find maybe smaller projects and above all to prepare the bigger ones, so as to be fully ready by 2014–20, to finance the larger ones in the new financial prospective.

But than again keeping in mind that all those things need to be conclusive and on a win-win-basis.

100 billion Euro: Sometimes Europe talks about the big figures when actually having no new money. 100 billion Euro is indeed the total amount of money for cohesion funds in the current financial prospective but this money is at least theoretically already allocated, but in fact a lot of this money has not been absorbed, so the Danube Strategy is a great opportunity to focus the minds in order to absorb what has been allocated and as I said to prepare the next round coming forward.

This is why – and here I will be closing at least from the substantive point of my little talk – we are very proud as not even being a candidate country that the European Union partners and also the Commission has accepted for us to host on the 27th September of this year in Belgrade and Commissioner Hahn and President of the European Investment bank, Mister Maystadt, have already accepted to cochair that meeting. We will be having a meeting on the funding and the governance of the Danube Strategy whereby we will be trying to reconcile the ambition, the expectations that

will be rightly raised by this Strategy with the tradition: no new money, no new legislation and no new institution.

I do hope that we will have the opportunity to have either Mr. Spindel-egger or one of the two, or maybe both Mr. Prölls, to join us in Belgrade for that meeting. I will unfortunately not be able to invite you for another very interesting meeting we set up in Novisad on the Petrovaradino, an Austrian outburst during some other historical times, for a “Young Danubian Leaders’ -Meeting”.

Austria is sending five young leaders who are 35 years old or less who have already some leadership-positions in the Danube development. There are already 17 of them registered, and I think that during those two days this generation will tell us how they see the Danube. There is a 28 year old captain from Serbia driving the boats, there is a 32 year old German Scientist, she is studying ecology, there will be also a young journalist from Rumania, a lot of young leaders and I look forward to welcome them all in Novisad.

If any of the gentlemen here is less than 35 years of age we will invite him as well, but I must say, that that been trying to stretch the limit on the age to qualify myself but not my staff says definitely I do not qualify.

So, let me recap: the Danube Strategy is the first and the last macro-regional strategy that we will ever have. For the 14 countries involved there is a need to think in a very inclusive manner so as to interest the entire European Union in order to make this a very successful strategy. The next two or three years will be difficult, because of the current crises and the need if you ready allocated money to fund the projects that can be funded and also to prepare the bigger ones that will be able to be funded in the next financial prospective 2014 and 2020.

I am very happy to have been able to say that today in Austria. Austria is the biggest investor in Serbia with over 2 billion Euro. Mr. Pröll has come to Bgrade three weeks ago to sign a double taxation avoidance treaty, that was long suffering. Mr. Spindelegger has come to visit us and we know we can count on Austria and also Niederösterreich to support us in the next two months on our European Agenda.

So with this, vielen Dank, and I will look forward to reading with you in the Strategy that will be published in July to make a great action plan during the second half of the year to talk in September in Belgrade about the financing, to celebrate next year during the Hungarian presidency and for the next decade to have a great project we can work on together.

Thank you very much.