

**Address to the HERD/ Agriculture conference in Sarajevo 1 October 2013
by the Ambassador to Bosnia & Herzegovina, Ms. Vibeke Lilloe.**

Dear members of HERD agriculture Board and secretariat, representatives of universities in the Western Balkan countries, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure for me to be here this morning - and I welcome you all to this conference which is part of the programme in higher education, research and development (HERD) in the Western Balkans. Focusing on main challenges related to agricultural activities, such as practical use of knowledge and knowledge transfer, institutional development as well as sustainability, the agenda for today's conference underlines the overall aim of herd - to contribute to economic growth and social development in the Western Balkans. And – in general, these challenges are also relevant to Bosnia-Herzegovina of course.

Norway and Bosnia-Herzegovina have since the mid-1990's developed an increasingly strong relationship. The Norwegian embassy in Sarajevo was opened in 1996, and the close ties between BiH and Norway have led to strong bilateral relations and cooperation.

After many years of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, our cooperation is now concentrating on assistance to building a well-functioning, sustainable and stable democracy – with emphasis on good governance – and to the benefit of all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When that is said, the justice sector, the defence and security sector, economic development, and support to building a strong civil society – are prioritized areas in our cooperation with BiH.

Norway continues to support Bosnia-Herzegovina on the way it has chosen itself – to Euro-Atlantic integration. We think the best way to achieve a well-functioning and prosperous democracy for all – is through BiH joining the European Union and NATO.

Membership in EU will bring access to the EU market and the common agricultural policy, and a say in European Union policies. NATO membership will also contribute to peace and stability, and will give a place around the table. We think such a development will contribute to bringing economic opportunities - and not least prosperity for the people of BiH and for this region.

Norway is a major contributor to economic and social development in the Western Balkans, not least in Bosnia-Herzegovina. BiH is the country in this region which is receiving the highest amount of cooperation funding.

As an integrated part of our total cooperation with the Western Balkans, the Norwegian embassy in Sarajevo – and other capitals - also administers two funds; the so-called embassy fund and the strengthening civil society fund. As regards the latter, our aim is to contribute to strengthening the watch dog and advocacy abilities of the civil society organizations, while the former funding is granted to smaller projects.

Within the economic and social spheres, agriculture is of great importance to all Western Balkans countries - because of its significant share of the GDP and the substantial part of the population that is active in the agricultural sector.

In BiH, the export of agricultural products is now unfortunately facing new challenges as a result of Croatia's membership in the EU. It may safely be said that BiH authorities started addressing the consequences of Croatia's EU membership somewhat late.

Today's non-compliance with EU standards in farm products, including meat and milk products, is cutting the export and thus contributing – in addition to other factors- to bih falling behind countries in the region in EU integration. I have heard that the authorities are working hard at these issues now, and let us sincerely hope that solutions will be presented very shortly. If not vital BiH interests will suffer.

Previous agricultural programs financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that the sector has been faced with several important constraints:

- Weak and sometimes contradictory governmental administration on several levels.
- Lack of national agricultural strategies that could enhance the agricultural/livestock sectors.
- Lack of producer incentives from the governments, e.g. Support for farmers, product price guarantees, farmers' access to markets etc.
- Removal of trade barriers that could have enhanced national agricultural production.
- Lack of proper certification of agricultural products and livestock, which is a challenge and prerequisite for exports, in particular to eu, the source of the challenges BiH has at present.
- Veterinary controls of animal health and products, and of imports, were weak or lacking altogether.
- Large import of (often subsidized) agricultural/ livestock products furthermore deteriorated producer opportunities and encouragement for local farmers

Norwegian support in the field of agriculture has therefore focused on projects that contribute to remedying some of these shortcomings.

In 2010 the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched *the “Programme in higher education, research and development (HERD) in the Western Balkans 2010 – 2014.”* The overall aim of the HERD-programme is to contribute to economic growth and social development through increased co-operation in higher education and research and development in the Western Balkans. This shall be achieved by supporting projects with the following objectives:

- To contribute to educating a national work force that has adequate innovative qualifications in the maritime, agricultural and energy sectors by building, in the longer term perspective, sustainable capacity of higher education institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo
- To stimulate innovation, product and process development in the maritime, agricultural and energy sectors through support to applied research and development in the Western Balkans, and
- To provide insight into development challenges by supporting regional social science research in the Western Balkans

The HERD programme is based on the principles of equality between the partners and transparency at all levels. HERD is built on a decentralized model for initiation, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

The leadership of the partner institutions **must** be committed to the projects. The selected areas of cooperation should be anchored in strategic plans at national levels in the partner country. Competence and capacity building is a vital part of Norwegian support to development of higher education and research.

The ministry has entered into an agreement with five institutions in norway for the administration of HERD programmes in the fields of energy, ict, maritime, development and agriculture.

The herd sector programme for agriculture is administered by the University of Life Sciences at Ås. Prior to the launching of the herd-program, the university had been involved in cooperation on research and education in the Western Balkans for very many years, particularly through two programs financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

HERD/ agriculture is the biggest of the HERD sector programs - and is now funding 13 projects in cooperation between institutions in Western Balkans and Norway.

They are embracing very many challenges – I will not go into detail now.

The HERD/ agriculture Board has followed and monitored the projects under their sector programme closely. They have held annual seminars for the project leaders, and they have visited all the projects and met very many project partners in Western

Balkans every year since 2011. They have so far delivered according to their plans and the programme's objectives.

As already mentioned, our embassy fund comprises support to various activities, including projects related to education and youth, as well business development. As regards business development in the field of agriculture: this year, we have supported a UNDP project related to sustainable berry farming, certification of farmers and smes for global good agricultural practice (gap) - thus providing access to markets for the successfully implemented refugee return process. We have also supported the establishment of a raspberry plantation in the area of sustainable return in Novi Grad, as well as the organization of the first investment forum of BiH diaspora in the Prijedor region, just to mention a few examples.

Let me also mention another project in the field of agriculture – one that has impressed us a lot. I am talking about the initiative of Jusuf Arifagic. Jusuf has been a refugee in Norway, and has done well. Now he is using his money – on a very large scale dairy farm in Kozarac , near Prijedor. Jusuf has the right attitude, namely to look ahead, his initiative is bold and brave, and will give work to local people when the dairy farm stand ready – not too long from now – with several hundred head of norwegian red cattle. Jusuf is using his own money, but we have helped in contacts with relevant authorities. Jusuf's story is a shining example – to be followed perhaps by others in the diaspora.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know that the projects that will be presented today are very interesting - in the way that they show challenges, possibilities and solutions - all the way from farm to fork.

I would like again to stress the importance of anchoring a strategic plan on national and entity level to get politicians on board.

I feel certain that the conference will provide food for thought as well as discussion and a solid basis for the rest of the programme of this conference.

Thank you! I wish you good work.