

Radovan Jelašić: Social responsibility in Serbia and the UN “Global Compact” Initiative

Speech by Mr Radovan Jelašić, Governor of the National Bank of Serbia, at the launch of the United Nations Global Compact Initiative (UNGC) in Serbia, Belgrade, 6 December 2007.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

When did you last visit a hospital that cares for children with mental health disorders? Where did you throw the glass bottle after you drank your juice yesterday? Is the building you live in accessible to physically handicapped people? Have you ever been to the area where Roma people live under the Gazela Bridge? And, at risk of sounding sarcastic, have you convinced yourself again today that all problems in this country should be dealt with by the government and that you have the right to criticize that same government to your heart's desire? Do you think that you as an ordinary citizen have some kind of responsibility for all those events taking place outside your micro cosmos? When was the last time you walked down Knez Mihajlova street looking up to read the names of legacy donors and asked yourself how we compare to them? Have you shaken hands, opened the door, smiled or simply been nice to anybody today?

What will our country look like in five or ten years time depends only on us and nobody else. If anyone should make our country more beautiful, it should be us, you and me, and we do not and can not have any excuse not to do something. You and I are those who not only have the opportunity but an obligation as well. We have the good will, and as company managers, some money on our hands too. So “let Serbia rise” as Dositej said, but not against somebody or something, but for a more beautiful, smiling and, above all else, happier Serbia.

If you are an enterprise that feels the need to do something more than just pay taxes regularly, which is of course necessary but not enough, then you are in the right place today! We have gathered here today to meet and to get to know one another, to unite people and companies who care, who know how and are willing to do more to better not only their own lives, but also the lives of all the people in our country. As a start, a big step forward will have been made if we who have gathered here today were to unite as people of good will who feel the need to do something more, something better, and something nobler for our country. And our country will not, can not and should not be changed by either the IMF, the World Bank or the European Union, but by us – you and me, and Mr. Vice-President and the ministers – today in their official capacity, and tomorrow as ordinary citizens.

The aim of today's launch and cooperation of the UN and the NBS is getting the information through to companies operating in Serbia about the Global Compact initiative, the largest global voluntary association dedicated to promoting socially responsible operations. The main reason for our participation in this project is not to support the launching of this initiative, but to learn something new and do something concrete together with the people who care about the future of our country and our planet. Cooperation of the public sector, non-government organizations, and companies is not only possible but also indispensable, and I am convinced that much more can be done to the benefit of all the participants.

Our research has shown that in Serbia today there is awareness of socially responsible operations, but more on conceptual level than in terms of concrete projects. What is lacking is the ignition spark, and I sincerely hope that today's meeting will provide just that!

There is a proverbial saying in our country that “Anything that can be bought for money is cheap.” So, in that spirit, it is not only the privatization receipts that matter in the context of foreign direct investments, but also the companies' attitude to social responsibility issues

which contributes to changing our country for the better. There are many companies in Serbia that have not yet had any experience with projects promoting socially responsible behavior, but what matters is their good will to join in.

Many companies and institutions, including the NBS, are already engaged in many activities that can be defined as socially responsible: waste recycling on the site, free of charge training of the NBS ex-employees, financial support to handicapped children, etc. However, as members of the Global Compact we shall have the opportunity to share our experiences, to formulate our common platform and to become a part of a bigger family.

And finally, let me be explicit: this is a voluntary gathering of people and companies – you have the opportunity but no obligation to join this initiative. You have no obligation but you have an opportunity to give, and give only as much as you think you ought to. You are not pressured in any way; there is no obligation on your part other than strictly moral, which I rank higher than any money-related obligation! But it feels good to be part of this initiative, as it creates positive energy and enables cooperation with people of good will who feel the need to do something more for Serbia. I wish you all welcome once again.