

Dear President Sinner,

I was astonished to hear at your Economic Forum Serbia Online on 31 May 2021 how good the organisations and the considerations for the settlement of new companies in Serbia are supposed to be. At least from our perspective of inland navigation, there is a completely different perception of what is happening there. We were the first western company to visit Belgrade with our ship with cargo from Rotterdam after the embargo in 1995. So we have a first-class opportunity to compare the conditions then and now. And unfortunately we have to conclude that - contrary to what your speakers conveyed - the conditions today are far more difficult than they were then.

Bezdan crossing the border until unloading at the port of destination in Serbia

Our journey from the border crossing at Bezdan to the unloading at the port of destination in Serbia throws a spotlight on this. Our ship unit is anchored at the border crossing. First, an agent comes in a boat to bring a crew member ashore. The agent costs €250. Our sailor has to take a huge amount of documents with him into the small boat to present them to the authority on shore:

- Ship's papers,
- cargo documents,
- crew list,
- report list.

Because we are importing goods from the EU into Serbia, the customs in Bezdan issue us with an additional Serbian customs document. In the case of fertiliser or scrap metal, an inspector has to come on board to measure the radioactivity. For the evaluation of this measurement, the authorities in Belgrade usually need 2 days, i.e. we arrive with our ship at the port of destination for unloading earlier than the confirmation is available there. Entry into the port there is only allowed after presentation of the radioactivity certificate. But this has not yet arrived from Bezdan. For our ship's unit, this means waiting, wasting precious time, and every minute less money in the account.

But it doesn't stop there. Recently, the Serbian authorities have started to charge a so-called "AIS monitoring fee" for the voyage of the ships of 200 to 300 €, depending on the size of the ship unit - for what and monitoring against what, we are not informed or it is completely inexplicable.

Still an agent ...

Another agent is needed to clear entry into the port, this time actually more like a postman, who has nothing more to do than take the documents from the ship to the relevant authorities on land. And after unloading or loading, a third agent becomes involved to draw up the documents and inform the port authorities. Costs for the agency and its alleged assistance another approx. 150 - 200 €, plus port dues of 250 - 400 € depending on the size and tonnage of the ship. Indeed: a smooth cooperation of officials from one pocket of the authorities to the other. What this is supposed to have to do with the paradise of free movement of goods on the Danube praised at your event, we missed a clarifying word from your lecture travellers.

After all, the crew of our ship is allowed to disembark to make purchases without having to report to the police. In return, however, the person in question must be removed from the crew list for the time of their shore leave.

In 1996, we gave all shipyards in Serbia a guarantee of the removal of hull units to the west, from Apatin, Novi Sad, Bejce, Belgrade and Sremska Mitrovica. Without this guarantee, some hulls would have been built less in Serbia. Even during the war period 1999/2000, ship units from Serbia came to the West in this way. To enter the harbour to the shipyard, we had to apply for a special permit then and take a pilot on board for a distance of only 150 m - and we still have to. If

we need an additional crew member because of additional floats, this person, whether from Serbia or an EU country, is not allowed to go on board immediately at the shipyard. He or she must travel to Belgrade, accompanied by a representative of the authorities, in order to have the necessary additional entry made for him or her in the crew list. Only then can the person in question return to the shipyard.

Contrary to the impression given at your event, this has not changed at all. Only the costs for this have risen exorbitantly to 250 - 350 €, depending on the shipyard. This was recently confirmed again when we picked up 2 small pontoons for IHC Holland in Sremska Mitrovica on 28 May 2021.

Environmental protection - an important issue, but not for Serbia

Interesting for us were the remarks at your video conference on the topic of environmental protection. Without a doubt, this is a very important topic for all of us. However, in Serbia this is only talked about, but rarely acted upon.

Moreover, the speakers seem to have a completely wrong idea about the alleged "exhaust gases from ships". This culminated in the assertion of one speaker that inland vessels in Europe are operated with heavy fuel oil. Here, however, she confused inland waterway vessel with seagoing vessel. Seagoing vessels use heavy fuel oil as fuel because most of them have filter systems suitable for this purpose, which could not be accommodated on an inland vessel in purely spatial terms. On European inland waterways and thus also on the Black Sea-North Sea transversal, only ship units run on diesel and an additive. This has been proven to ensure that the ships only emit a minimum of exhaust gases and that the fuel is burnt better.

In the West, we have to pay about € 8.00 per 1000 litres for the disposal of the oil waste and bilge water from the engine compartment by a disposal ship every time we take on fuel. There are no such disposal ships in Hungary or Serbia. At your video conference, we did not hear anything from any of the speakers on whether a rethink has begun in the aforementioned riparian states and by when we can expect professional oil waste disposal as in the West.

Serbian as labour force

Perhaps one last remark on the subject of Serbian persons as workers. These persons need a work permit from the Serbian authorities to work abroad. However, there are very few qualified workers in Serbia; because the workers who can work abroad do so. Here it would be important for those responsible to say whether and what measures they intend to take to remedy this state of affairs, e.g. by waiving the state work permit.

Conclusion in the 25 years I have been working on the Danube: nothing has improved in Serbia in a quarter of a century since the war. The bureaucracy of the Milosevic era has not been dismantled since then, but instead the possibilities of money collection by the authorities have been expanded to such an extent that a prosperous economic cooperation in a united Europe, connected by the Blue Ribbon of the Danube, which the OWWF always likes to cite, is simply impossible. It would be of central importance for the free movement of goods and people in Europe if the EU would not let its interlocutors within its borders and accession candidates such as Serbia fob off with lip service, but instead demand action, real commitments and their implementation instead of bureaucracy and rip-off mentality.

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