

Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference



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OHR/EUSR

Bosnia-Herzegovina's European Perspective

The day after tomorrow, on Thursday, High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčak will initiate a public debate with BiH citizens on the process of European integration of this country.

The experience of the countries that recently joined the European Union shows that the involvement of all sectors of society in the debate on EU integration can strengthen and speed up the accession process. After all, Europe is a project of citizens and for citizens. For that reason it is extremely important to enable the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina to take an active role in the process of EU integration.

In order to incite a true public debate on European integration, Miroslav Lajčak invites all citizens of BiH to join in the dialogue with him as the Special Representative of European Union, and, more importantly, talk about their vision

of BiH and its European future.

The goal is to hear the voice of non-governmental actors, creators of public opinion and social groups that are interested in European integration and are currently not involved in the debate in the country.

The first event is the conference that will take place on Thursday in the Holiday Inn hotel, and it will gather policy-makers and other protagonists who take part in policy-making, including different profiles of civil society, business community, European family and other actors from within the international community.

The conference starts at 9.30; the opening remarks will be delivered by the following:

H.E. Mr. Željko Komšić, Chairman of BiH Presidency

H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina and High Representative

H.E. Ms. Nataša Vodušek, Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia in BiH and

H.E. Mr. Dimitris Kourkoulas

Head of EC Delegation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The opening statements will be followed by two round table discussions. The topic of the first one is: «Why is there no EU-BiH debate in this country?», with the following participants:

Mr. Haris Pašović, theatre director, “Europe Now” Initiative,

H.E. Mr. Igor Davidović, chief BiH negotiator on SAA with the EU,

Mr. Draško Ignjatić, main editor of RS Television Information Programme,

Ms. Duška Jurišić, journalist and editor, RTV FBiH,

The second topic is about the experiences of the neighbouring countries. How did they initiate the debate on their European future? The participants are the following:

Mr. Goran Svilanović, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro,

Mr. Hido Bišćević, Secretary General of the Southeast Europe Regional Cooperation Council,

Mr. Aleksandar Pejović, Director of EU Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Montenegro,

and Mr. Osman Topčagić, Director of European Integration Directorate of BiH.

The conference will be followed by 16 public debates to be held throughout BiH. The High Representative and EU Special Representative, together with ambassadors of EU member countries, will be joining the participants of the debates in order to discuss the challenges and possibilities of EU integration.

How will EU membership help:

- strengthen security and democracy in BiH?
- improve economy, incite investments and create new jobs?
- improve regional development and cooperation?
- create better possibilities for the young people and raise education standards?

One of the main goals of these debates is to incite constructive dialogues among citizens and thus make their voice heard.

The debates start in Dobož on 21 February of this year.

OSCE

Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina Should Be Inclusive, Not Exclusive

Among the human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Article II of Annex Four of the Dayton Agreement are freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of expression; freedom of peaceful assembly; and freedom of association with others.

Recently, certain educational authorities in Canton Sarajevo have apparently proposed introducing religious instruction into the kindergarten curriculum. While in theory there is nothing wrong with this, beyond of course adding a subject to the pre-school curriculum that most experts would contend ought not to be taught until students grow much older, it does raise questions about exclusivity and discrimination, for reports also suggest that such instruction would be purely Islamic in orientation.

In a multi-national and multi-confessional country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, this threatens to work against the fundamental freedoms guaranteed in the country's own constitution, which also states that: "the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms provided for in this Article or in the international agreements listed in Annex I to this Constitution shall be secured to all persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."

In addition, the newly adopted Framework Law on Pre-school Education states: "pre-school institutions shall develop, promote and respect national and religious freedom, customs, tolerance and the culture of dialogue."

In the interests of fairness and of compliance with the current legal and constitutional order, it would seem only logical for the cantonal authorities to introduce religious instruction into the canton's pre-schools in *all* the faiths and confessions represented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the interests of proper pedagogy, however, it would also seem more sensible to postpone such instruction until such time as students are of an age and intellectual maturity to be able properly to receive it.

We are therefore moved to suggest that this country's political and religious leaders focus their energies and efforts instead on something that is of fundamental important to their future in Europe - that is, on transforming the country's pre-school, primary and secondary schools from institutions that emphasise the differences among peoples into institutions that foster a sense that the citizens of this country can have more than one identity - they can be, for instance, bridge-jumpers, Mostarians, Bosniacs or Croats or Serbs, and Bosnian-Herzegovinians at one and the same time - and still share a sense of common allegiance to the state.

Unless it cultivates and creates this sense of belonging among its citizens, regardless of their race or religion or culture, Bosnia and Herzegovina has little prospect of taking its desired place in the larger European family of democratic states.

EUFOR

There was no statement.