

HR/EUSR Welcome Speech at the European Movement Conference on the Role of the European Movement in Society and the EU Integration Process



Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

First let me thank the organizers of this event for the invitation and also I would like to confirm the importance of the European integrations for this country.

I'm not going to talk to you today about the benefits that EU accession brings. You are all well aware of that.

Nor do I not want to linger on the current political situation – you are all aware of where this country is at the moment.

Instead I want to talk to you of my own experience and the experience of my country – Slovakia – that while very different from Bosnia and Herzegovina, faced many similar challenges and overcame them.

I have often made the point that integrating a country into the European Union requires sustained commitment, dedication, decisiveness and courage.

That means that that success can not be secured by anyone on their own: not the most charismatic politician, the best manager, not even an EU

Special Representative – even if his other function is that of the High Representative – can do this.

No single political party, institution, governmental or not, can achieve this on its own.

The experience of all new Member States, including my own country shows that the only way for this goal to be achieved is for the European agenda to become the foundation on which the country builds itself.

In the mid nineties Slovakia was perceived as a black hole in Central Europe. We were a long way behind the other countries. We could not begin the negotiations for EU membership. We were not being taken seriously by NATO.

The message from the EU was clear; EU membership is open, but you must clearly demonstrate your commitment to the EU.

Less than a decade later Slovakia was a member of the EU and a member of NATO.

There was no miracle; the EU did not reduce the entry requirements for Slovakia.

Simply, Slovakia changed from the inside.

The citizens demanded changes and the non-governmental sector together with other non-state actors worked with the government, parliamentarians, civil servants and the media to speed up the EU integration process.

The EU agenda became the only agenda. There was full understanding from all political parties that the EU agenda will not be the subject of party politics. The political battleground was moved to other issues.

This consensus between all sectors of the society and all political forces enabled Slovakia to make faster progress than any of the other Candidate countries.

We caught up with our neighbours and now Slovakia is an example how to quickly deal with necessary reforms and other social issues that come out

of the integration process.

But what does this mean for Bosnia and Herzegovina?

First of all it means that the EU agenda must not become a hostage of party politics. There must be a high level of cooperation between political parties, not only when it comes to voting in the institutions, but also in the implementation of the reforms.

The citizens must be clearly repeating their support for a European future and that they will vote for those politicians who can take them there faster.

The non-governmental sector should be organised, not only to check if the political leadership is fulfilling its promises; but more importantly to play an active role helping draft and support legislation. The NGO sector is not a watchdog to bark or bite but is a partner, helping to assure success.

As I said at the beginning BiH is not Slovakia: Bosnia and Herzegovina is a specific country with specific problems and its own path. We are all aware of this.

This is why the EU has deployed all of its instruments in BiH; political, diplomatic, military and civilian missions; to give this country all the help it needs on the way to Europe.

This process is ongoing. This is why I support your bring together this country's pro-European forces. For my part I have engaged in a series of debates to make the public understand the importance of their participation in this process.

I said that I would not focus on the current political situation, However today the BiH House of Peoples will take a decision on European progress of BiH.

We all know that police reform legislation is the last main political requirement before SAA signature.

This process has been an example how not to proceed towards the EU. Four

years have been lost so far and some politicians both in government and in opposition seem to be ready to waste more time.

The European integration is a strategic challenge for the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a strategic country in the heart of an area of primary importance for the EU.

That is why I can guarantee that you will have my support in all your efforts to make this country move towards the EU.

Thank you.