



New Year's message of the High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina

2008: Year of European Chances

Bosnia and Herzegovina enters the year 2008 with a certain perspective. This time last year, not much could be foreseen, and, indeed, it was marked with a difficult atmosphere and attempts to postpone essential issues.

Facing up to the fundamental problems of this country was not pleasant at all, not least seeing citizens in panic, wondering rightly whether bad times could happen again.

Fortunately, at the very end of the year when the tensions subsided, common sense prevailed. Thanks to that, we were able to remove the obstacles which had been slowing down the development path of this country for years. Therefore, I believe that 2008 can be the year in which the citizens and peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina could start enjoying the fruits of further integration into the union of European states. When the ice was broken at the end of the year and the Stabilization and Association Agreement was initialed, many were relieved. And political leaders realized that it was only by agreement that they could lead this country forward.

The priority in 2008 is surely signing the Agreement, and further progress towards the European Union. But before that, as of 1st January many citizens will be able to obtain visas for EU countries more easily. It is important to continue at this pace, meet the remaining conditions and there will be fewer and fewer reasons for dissatisfaction. Of course, one should always remember that one can go faster, stronger, higher than before – just like the Olympic slogan dear to you all says – and it will echo in the forthcoming Olympic year, too.

So, we all will have to roll up our sleeves at the very beginning as the promises made during talks in Mostar, Sarajevo and Banja Luka need to be met. This will not be easy at all, because Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex country. However, knowing that tolerance has adorned the BiH society for centuries, all it takes is to turn it into reality in a creative and cool-headed way. I expect, therefore, that the spirit of tolerance, appreciation and understanding will also adorn the period before us, when we need to open, among others, the constitutional talks about creating a better and more efficient state, based on the principles of human rights and a modern democratic order.

It is this kind of spirit in which the recent agreements have been struck, and I expect a permanent dialogue to be established between decision-makers so that the country does not stay behind with reforms. The leaders promised this to you and they can do it in 2008. I am at their disposal to help them and expect you to exert the civic, decisive pressure when it comes to key progress.

Together, we can lead this country to where it belongs - a community of civilized, European and prosperous societies.

I wish you a happy and successful New Year.