

Speech by the High Representative/EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák To the Pan European Union



Mr President, Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, dear guests,

I would like to thank the Pan-European Union of BiH for the invitation to speak here today.

I am very pleased to see here representatives of BiH authorities, many Euro-enthusiasts and representatives of the governments from the region.

All of us here understand the security and economic stability that the EU has to offer: when the central European countries joined the Union in 2004 this was a huge step forward for the whole continent. We all welcomed it.

Now, the Western Balkans remain the only part of Europe that is outside of the Union.

After almost two decades of instability this region is now moving towards the EU.

Following frequent delays due to the lack of cooperation with ICTY, Serbia has completed the technical negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement and further progress

is dependent on its full cooperation with ICTY. Montenegro has in the meantime initialled the SAA on 15 March 2007. Albania signed the SAA in June 2006 and is in the process of implementation. FYROM (Macedonia) became an official Candidate for EU Membership in December 2005 and Croatia as a Candidate Country is progressing in its negotiations for full EU Membership.

Where is Bosnia and Herzegovina?

For its part, since 1999 the EU has given clear and undisputed commitment to BiH joining the EU. The European Union has continued to keep its promise of a European Union future.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also made progress. It has completed the technical negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement; its first contractual relationship with the EU.

What remains outstanding is a clear commitment by the political leaders to find agreement on an issue that will improve security of the citizens and the country: Police reform.

It is a reform that all three Parliaments in Bosnia and Herzegovina's signed up to in October 2005 as a precondition to start the SAA negotiations with the European Commission.

The issue has been under discussion for more than 3 years and nothing new can be added to the debate.

The country's political leaders face a simple choice, between EU integration, which is what vast majority of the citizens want, and isolation, which is not in anyone's interests.

The countries that joined the European Union made an enormous commitment to ensure that all tasks ahead of them were completed. Their political will resulted in harmonisation of

their government structures and economic systems with other members of the EU. It was not easy for any country. I know, since I was closely involved in my own country's preparations to become an EU Member State.

This is a tried and tested development strategy – it was successful for the EU Member States that joined in 2004; and there is absolutely no reason why it should not work for BiH.

In all the countries that went through this transition, the political leaders had to explain and persuade their people that integration with the EU and the necessary reforms were for their own benefit.

The challenge we have in Bosnia and Herzegovina is that it looks as if some politicians believe that it should be the other way around – that the European Union should be the one to persuading them and the citizens that integration is the way forward!

For 70% of BiH's population; for those of us here working to see BiH in the EU; for those working in the EU institutions in Brussels and for the representatives of the EU's 27 member states; this is very strange, even to say incomprehensible.

The fact is that the EU exists and functions without BiH. The European Union cannot and will not change its principles and systems to accommodate BiH; it is countries aspiring to EU Membership that have to adjust to the EU.

In conclusion allow me to reiterate once more: there is no alternative to European integration for BiH. This country is historically and geographically part of Europe and economically it is tied to Europe.

The question is how much time will the citizens loose before everyone understands this.

The Honorary President of the Pan-European Union, Dr Otto von

Habsburg – whom I particularly welcome here today – famously, placed an empty chair in the Plenary Meeting Room of the European Parliament.

This empty chair was meant to represent the people of Central and Eastern Europe. My fear is that in the future it may come to represent Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Europe will never be complete without Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is why all of us here today have a duty to this country and its citizens to do our utmost for the European future of this country.