



## **Article by Chris Bennett, OHR / EUSR Director of Communications** **“Institutions Have to Start Emulating Pop Singers”**

Marija Sestic is representing Bosnia and Herzegovina in Helsinki this year with an exceptionally catchy Euro-song. My wife, children and I will join a substantial segment of the country's citizens on Saturday evening by tuning in to see how she does in the Eurovision final.

*River Without a Name* is just the latest in a series of genuinely popular Euro-songs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, performed by musicians who successfully combine the sort of glitz that is part and parcel of Eurovision with the vocal charisma that transforms a melody into something the rest of us find ourselves humming.

This is part of a long tradition. Bosnia and Herzegovina has produced a string of world-class popular performers – all blessed with musical talent and a natural ability to engage with audiences well beyond the country and the region.

If only these qualities were more apparent in other fields. This year's song speaks about turning “a river of tears into gold” and that is exactly the challenge facing the politicians and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There have been more than enough tears, and there needn't be more – this country has the social, political and economic capacity to succeed, if its leaders start displaying the same confidence and professional ability that is so evident among its professional musicians.

Last month in Paris, the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina signed a protocol under which it took back command and control of its airspace from EUFOR. This follows successive transfers of airspace competence to the domestic authorities during the past eight years. Bosnia and Herzegovina, through its Civil Aviation Authority, has now resumed its obligations in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organisation Convention and exercises sovereign control over its airspace (though over-flight control continues to be subcontracted to flight centres elsewhere in the region).

This is a key element in the country's post-war recovery and in its long path towards complete normalisation. But when a country resumes control of its own airspace this is only part of the story. Equally important is how Bosnia and Herzegovina uses this resource – and currently it isn't using its airspace well.

In the past two years, there has been a real prospect of establishing new flight connections with the rest of Europe that would have made it easier and cheaper for members of the Diaspora to come home on short visits, for example, and which would have moved Bosnia and Herzegovina into the centre of the lucrative European tourism market. Those who wish to see this country's massive tourism potential turned into tens of thousands of new jobs watched in horror as expressions of interest from low-cost carriers, such as Germanwings were greeted with administrative hurdles. As a result, the airlines withdrew their interest and looked elsewhere for new destinations.

It is imperative to learn from this, so that if the opportunity comes along again to establish economical air links between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the rest of Europe, we seize it instead of letting it slip away.

This country's institutions have to start emulating its pop singers. Marija Sestic, Hari Mata Hari, Femminem and others in previous years, show that professionals from this country know exactly how to behave and how to succeed on the international stage. They have confidence and charisma; their political representatives need to show the same.

Of course, musical snobs look down on Eurovision – but what do they know. Here is a showcase for European popular culture – and it is one in which Bosnia and Herzegovina easily holds its own. Good luck, Marija!

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