

High Representative Marks Next Phase on the road to Europe

It is fitting that the official launch of Stabilisation and Association negotiations between BiH and the European Commission should fall on the Day of BiH Statehood. Stabilisation and Association process is a decisive step forward in creating a viable state that delivers proper services to its citizens.

Congratulating BiH's citizens on the Day of BiH Statehood the High Representative said; "this is a day when we celebrate the distinctive character of Bosnia and Herzegovina , a country that has faced the most formidable challenges but which boasts the most remarkable cultural and social heritage. Today, BiH has achieved a historic milestone: 10 years after the end of the war, BiH has transformed itself; so much so that the EU has endorsed the start of the SAA process which will eventually lead BiH to full EU membership and sovereignty. This inaugurates a long-awaited transition – between a period where political, economic and social energies were focused on creating post-war stability and recovery to a new era in which the focus of these energies will be on securing the prosperity and development that come from full membership of Euro-Atlantic structures."

"BiH has come a long way," the High Representative said. "Getting this far has involved a swathe of deep and difficult reforms in the judicial, defence, police and fiscal sectors. The BiH government has been strengthened and expanded and the Single Economic Space has come closer to being a reality. These are foundations on which to build, and a great deal of building now has to be done. The real heroes of this process are BiH's citizens."

The High Representative emphasised that the hard work is not over. "Speedy progress down the EU road will require determination and commitment. This new phase will be marked by a change in the International Community's engagement, with BiH's leaders taking on greater responsibility and initiative in delivering the reforms that will benefit BiH's citizens and keep the SAA process moving forward. The OHR cannot get BiH into Europe; BiH's Politicians can do that. Practically that means making the state institutions we have created in the last three and a half years function effectively. BiH must cut the cost of Government, which currently impoverishes citizens and stifles the economy, to make the country function in the interests of its citizens".

"I welcome that fact that the first steps in this process were taken by consensus this week in Washington," the High Representative said, "and that augurs well for BiH in the next phase of its journey towards building a functional, modern European State."