

Reform is for the citizens, not just Europe

In his speech to the presidents and prime ministers from Southeast Europe, meeting in Sarajevo today, the High Representative stressed that every element in the huge reform agenda – every law, every bilateral agreement and every institutional change – brings *benefits* to citizens.

“The process of European integration requires focus. It requires discipline. It requires political, economic and social transformation. And that means difficult decisions, hard choices. But here’s the point: these reforms are not just for Europe – but for your citizens.”

“It’s not a question of jumping through hoops to satisfy bureaucrats in Brussels,” the High Representative said. “It’s a question of getting on with the work that is necessary to provide peace, security and a better life for your citizens. The citizens in all our countries benefit from the introduction of modern and equitable taxation systems, from the spread of EU-standard policing, from the consolidation of the rule of law and of genuine representative democracy.”

The High Representative was speaking at the Seventh Summit of Heads of State and Government of Southeast European Cooperation Process Member Countries.

Referring to the European Commission’s announcement on Tuesday that Croatia has successfully fulfilled the criteria for beginning of negotiations for European Union, the High Representative noted that “Croatia has shown that what matters is not words, not what party is in power, not who is in government and who is out – but only one thing – actions and reforms. It has shown that Europe is not an impossible dream for the countries that were so recently ravaged by war in the

former Yugoslavia – but a real prospect that is waiting, if we are prepared to undertake the necessary reforms.”

He added that “Europe has shown that it takes the region seriously – and it is now up to countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina to follow Croatia’s example. In yesterday’s decision, Europe showed it was truly committed to the region. And a major country of the region showed it was really committed to Europe.”

The High Representative emphasized that “there is no getting into Europe as long as regimes support – materially or politically – those indicted for war crimes. There is no getting into Europe if we compromise on European standards. We will fail if, on issues such as education, we continue to believe that the false protections of the past are a better bet for the preservation of our culture and human rights than the protections of a European future.”

The High Representative commended the BiH Presidency and Foreign Ministry for the able way in which BiH has chaired the SEECP process in the course of the last year. He said the momentum behind the regional anti-crime and economic cooperation initiatives is growing “thanks to BiH’s leadership of the process.”