

BiH Needs Democratic Dialogue on EU Integration



Bosnia and Herzegovina's European future is not a project between the political elite and the European Union, but requires involvement and full support from all sectors of society, High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák said today.

"Unlike other countries that have joined the EU, BiH has until now failed to witness wider participation in the integration process," Ambassador Lajčák told a conference in Sarajevo.

"Seventy percent of citizens consistently say they want BiH to get into Europe as quickly as possible – but 70 percent of citizens are not actively involved in making that happen," he said. "Until now they have left responsibility for European integration entirely in the hands of the political leadership. And the results have been modest."

The HR/EUSR was joined by the European Commission Delegation Head Dimitris Kourkoulas, and Slovenian Ambassador Nataša Vodušek representing the EU Presidency at the opening of the conference, which launched a campaign to encourage BiH citizens to take EU integration into their own hands.

The campaign will include public debates to be held in 16 towns and cities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina over the next two months.

“The initialling of the SAA last December was an important step in the right direction – but I and other EU representatives had to persuade the political leadership to do what was necessary. In other EU candidate countries the political leadership lobbied the EU – not the opposite way round!” Ambassador Lajčák said.

He said one of the shortcomings of BiH’s integration effort so far has been “a failure to connect integration with practical improvements to living standards,” and he said a constructive popular debate on integration should focus on how EU membership will “consolidate BiH security and democracy, **i**mprove the economic climate, stimulating investment and job creation, **i**ncrease regional development and cooperation, and create opportunities for youth and raise education standards.”

Ambassador Lajčák said that public consultation could “establish a process through which the population can stop being silent and begin to speak. It is time to expand the political discourse. Our overarching objective is to make this country stable, prosperous, democratic and secure and a member of the EU. This is a process in which the whole of society must take part for it concerns everyone; it is a process that can continue until the country joins the EU.”