

EU Integration Addresses the Fundamental Issues of BiH Statehood



Despite persistent and fundamental differences among the constituent peoples over Bosnia and Herzegovina's history, current status and future constitutional structure, prospects for achieving a self-sustaining peace based on viable statehood and Euro-Atlantic integration are steadily improving, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák, said in Vienna today.

"The fact is that the incentive of eventual European Union membership and the enormous resources that would accompany the integration process have combined – and will increasingly combine – to address and resolve many of the challenges posed by the country's historical legacy and multinational reality," Lajčák told a meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE.

The HR/EUSR added that "the main goal of our future engagement will be to ensure that EU integration remains at the top of the political agenda and serves as the main driver towards ever-more cohesion, competency and reform."

Following two years of political gridlock and crises, and now in an election year, BiH is entering a "highly demanding phase of making good on the SAA, the interim agreement that will follow and the opportunity Brussels has offered for the eventual elimination of visas," Lajčák said. "Managing all this at once will require a degree of political concord, practical application, hard work and sound judgment on the

part of the domestic authorities that will test them to the limit." However, he emphasised that "Bosnia and Herzegovina's peace, security, prosperity and statehood are best guaranteed by maintaining progress towards Europe."

The HR/EUSR said that "if the 'soft power' of European integration is to supplant the 'hard power' of Dayton and an OHR with executive powers, the people, politicians and institutions of BiH will have to do the heavy lifting: both in making OHR redundant and in making themselves fit for EU accession." He added that "the closure of OHR will confirm Dayton's success. But this can only happen if and when the conditions are met." The conditions and benchmarks, he noted, have been clearly laid out by the PIC, and progress in meeting these will be examined when the PIC meets later this month and again in the autumn.

In view of the eventual transition from OHR to EUSR, there is a need for other international organisations to stay strong and focussed. Lajčák in particular underlined the key role of the OSCE in supporting confidence- and security-building measures; good municipal government, democratic oversight and education reform.

Referring to his ongoing public debates with citizens from all parts of BiH, Lajčák said he fully agrees with the demands from young people for a more inclusive and modern education system. "All forms of discrimination should be removed from the education system before the country becomes an EU member. And here I mean the segregation that exists in the form of '2 schools under 1 roof', or the assimilation that prevails in other areas of BiH where the curriculum of the majority community prevails over the minority community", Lajčák said.

The OSCE should also remain focused on developments in the justice sector, through its monitoring of war crime trials, and promotion of human rights which will all serve to complement BiH's own Euro-Atlantic integration efforts, he

added.

“Steady progress towards EU membership can and should unlock the readiness to compromise that is so hard to see today,” the HR/EUSR concluded. “I believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina’s political leaders will be able to agree on those constitutional changes that are clearly necessary to secure EU membership, because more than 70 percent of their constituents want to join the EU and expect their leaders to get them there – and sooner rather than later.”

[Full transcript of the speech.](#)