

European Integration Will Bring Mutual Benefits

The process of European integration will succeed in a satisfactory way only if it is understood to be a process of mutual benefit – one that can enrich both Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the EU, the High Representative will argue at a conference on European identity to be held in Banja Luka this evening. He will say that this is one of the core arguments that he has been making in recent weeks in his efforts to promote visa facilitation for BiH's citizens.

“The logic of the argument is not that BiH citizens should be viewed with indulgence or generosity or special concern, but that their free movement in and out of Europe will bring social and economic benefits not only to BiH but also to the EU,” the High Representative will say.

He will say that the process of European integration is commonly misunderstood as a process of incorporation or absorption, which it is not. BiH's eventual accession will bring a range of distinct benefits to the EU, as well as to BiH.

But in order to make this case effectively, BiH representatives must tap into reserves of popular self-confidence, integrity and optimism. “As High Representative I can legitimately – and I hope effectively – undertake this kind of lobbying on behalf of BiH. But when it comes to mustering the reserves of popular self-confidence, integrity and optimism that must underpin this kind of lobbying, I cannot do that. The people of BiH and their leaders must do that,” he will say.

The High Representative will emphasize that a major element of BiH's identity derives from its religious traditions. “It is

crucial that religious values are marshaled and deployed so as to create and consolidate a civil society, a society in which the voice and conscience of the individual are the bedrock of political and social norms. Religious communities, their members and their leaders, have a unique and potentially huge role in forging such a society.” He will also say that we must not forget that European identity also derives from the spirit of enlightenment which led the Europeans to base their society on its philosophical traditions leading to a modern society based on the Rule of Law, science and rationality.

The High Representative will note that the influence of religious leaders is powerful and constructive when they “speak up for religious communities *other* than their own, when they lead the way in rebuilding places of worship *other* than their own; when they see themselves as leaders of people and not of a *particular* people. What I believe is needed – and needed urgently – is a transition from advocating a political agenda to giving clear and timely witness to the primacy of love and reconciliation. This society cannot move forward without this kind of witness – and it is the role (and the moral obligation) of religious communities to *give* this kind of witness.”