

Lajčák: European Integration Means Job Creation



European integration has a direct and dynamic impact on job creation, EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák told representatives of employers, trade unions and the BiH authorities at conference on labour and employment in Sarajevo today.

“In Bosnia and Herzegovina until now labour and employment policies have not been sufficiently coordinated and the results are painfully clear – mass unemployment and its social consequences cast a very long shadow over the country,” the EUSR said.

He stressed that “European integration is absolutely focused on tackling problems that citizens face in daily life,” and he listed steps that BiH must take under the integration process in order to create more job opportunities and help companies become more competitive.

“A worker should be able to take advantage of job openings anywhere in the country – and issues such as health insurance and pension provision should not get in the way of this,” he said. “The advantages of a properly functioning labour market, to both workers and employers, are clear: job opportunities will be expanded and companies will be able to tap into the skills that are available in Bosnia and Herzegovina but that are currently cocooned in unnecessary red tape.”

The EUSR stressed that this is one of the short-term

requirements of the integration process. "Another short-term objective is to develop mechanisms for social dialogue – bringing trades unions, employers, and the authorities together to consult and negotiate labour and employment issues."

Noting that small and medium-sized enterprises now account for two thirds of all jobs in the European Union private sector, Lajčák said that as part of the accession process BiH must also create a coherent legal and institutional framework for small and medium sized enterprises, which includes establishing a forum for dialogue and consultation with SMEs.

The two-day conference follows a series of town-hall meetings organised by the EUSR, where job creation repeatedly came top or near the top of citizens' concerns.

The EUSR is committed to bringing the EU agenda back to the forefront of the BiH public debate by engaging different sectors of BiH society, namely parliamentarians and authorities, civil society, youth as well as the media.

"Some observers will throw up their hands and say that in this country tackling fundamental issues such as reducing red tape or eliminating obstacles to worker mobility cannot be done in the short term," the HE/EUSR said. "To this I would respond that this is such an urgent task, it MUST be tackled in the short term. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs a countrywide strategy for creating jobs and it needs it now.

"The European experience shows that adopting an employment strategy and developing an effective social dialogue, for example by establishing an Economic and Social Council will help make companies in BiH more competitive and help create jobs – and that must be the overarching objective of this roundtable and of government economic policy," Lajčák concluded.

The conference continues tomorrow.