

# New Year's Address of the High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Dear citizens,

In the year that is coming to an end, most of us experienced a feeling of frustration and discontent due to the slow pace of resolving problems in this country.

The international community, the European Union and myself understand, and share that frustration.

Foreigners are in your country for one reason only – because we believe that you deserve all possible help to begin leading normal, European lives as soon as possible

Everyone is tired of political games and the lack of progress, even on the most fundamental issues.

This is why I often hear appeals for removal of one politician or another, or in some cases, all of them together.

I am aware of my mandate and I am not afraid to use my powers if anyone steps outside the framework of the Peace Agreement.

Although my predecessors and I have used our powers more than 900 times, it is a fact that we are again faced with politicians who are capable of doubling their salaries, but who are unable to enact more than twenty laws in a year.

It is clear that the Bonn Powers cannot raise living standards, create new jobs, or abolish the visa regime.

Only the representatives you have chosen can do that.

It is also clear how these things should be done. Without a comprehensive plan and effective action, the only thing awaiting this country next year is stagnation.

Despite claims that one entity is better, or that the other still represents the real power of the country, I believe these statements are nothing more than mere propaganda.

In both entities average salaries are around 780 KM. The average salary in the European Union is three times higher!

The only right way towards such a standard is faster integration in the European Union.

Although we have made some progress – I mean here, of course the Stabilization and Association Agreement, signed in June – BiH is not even close to a reform momentum that will really improve or at least ease the lives of ordinary citizens.

This means that pressure must be exerted constantly on BiH politicians so that it becomes impossible for them to shun responsibility. It has been shown that they have the capacity to reach agreement on their own initiative, but this is still not enough, because what has been agreed needs to be translated into action.

I know that citizens of this country are not satisfied, but also that they often think they cannot change anything.

I do not agree with this assessment.

The little progress we saw in 2008 was made when politicians were faced with a suspension of the EU integration process and realized the dissatisfaction that this would generate among citizens.

When the International Community and citizens unite – things can change.

We can and must make European integration a real priority.

For all of us, 2009 is a critical year.

Apart from economic and financial crises, BiH today again lags behind the other countries in the region.

Many in the region have announced that they will apply for candidate status next year.

However, nobody in BiH can argue that BiH earned this status in 2008.

In the next year I expect individual countries in the region to be granted a visa-free regime with the EU. BiH officials themselves admit that this will certainly not happen as far as this country is concerned before 2010.

We cannot be content with such an attitude.

The year 2009 is important for BiH because in 2010 we will once again enter an election year. Experience shows that once again politicians will be focused on division – with the aim of keeping their positions – and not on real work.

That means that if we fail to make progress in 2009, we face further stagnation, radicalisation, divisions and isolation.

In the coming year I believe that the citizens of this country are entitled to expect concrete activities to raise living standards and accelerate progress along the European road. By this I primarily have in mind the beginning of the

constitutional reform process and progress in meeting the requirements for a visa-free regime, as well as overall progress towards Europe.

I will do my best to convince politicians that they must demonstrate more wisdom, and less irresponsibility – and I appeal to YOU, the citizens, to help me in this. You are the ones who can exert the necessary pressure on them.

With that promise and hope, I wish you a happy and peaceful 2009.