

Remarks by the High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák at the EUFOR Change of Command Ceremony



It is my great pleasure to mark another successful year for EUFOR. Sincere thanks to General McColl, Admiral Witthauer, and all EUFOR personnel for a job well done. Also thanks to the EUSR, EUPM and EUMM for their invaluable contribution.

During the past year, EUFOR has been reconfigured and streamlined. It continues successfully to contribute to the safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And with EUPM, it has supported the fight against organised crime.

EUFOR has continued to transfer inspection and supervisory tasks to the local authorities, where they rightly belong. Along with the rest of the EU family, EUFOR is committed to helping Bosnia and Herzegovina to assume increasing responsibility for its own affairs, and to improve its capacity to do so.

But 2007 has not been an easy year for Bosnia and Herzegovina: there has been limited progress on key reforms – namely police and constitutional; and more political rhetoric than leadership.

Time has now come for Bosnia and Herzegovina to get back on to the European track. This is our commitment, Bosnia's opportunity, and the will of a vast majority of the population.

But a lot of work lies ahead. The European reform agenda – in particular – needs further attention. The progress made over the last days is of course encouraging, especially today's initialling of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. But EU needs evidence of real progress on key reforms – including police restructuring – before we can sign. This was what we agreed with Bosnia and Herzegovina when we opened the negotiations, and this still remains our position.

Let me be clear: the EU remains fully committed to supporting BiH. We will not abandon it. The closer the country moves to Europe, the deeper our relations will be. And we will maintain EUFOR for as long as necessary. EUFOR is – and will remain – effective, credible, visible and robust, both through troops on the ground and over-the-horizon reserves. It remains ready to act in the event of threats to stability and security.

Finally, it simply remains for me to encourage EUFOR to keep up its excellent work; to thank General McColl, the new Operation Commander, for his work and support; to congratulate Admiral Witthauer once again on a job very well done and wish him well in his next appointment; and to welcome General Villalaín to this important position as COM/EUFOR.

Thank you very much.