

Remarks by the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák Visiting the BiH Council of Ministers' European Directorate



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you all today.

In my dealings with the European Directorate, and with all those who are involved in preparing Bosnia and Herzegovina for eventual EU membership, I am constantly reminded of the fact that there is a constructive perspective that is notably different from the self-destructive politics we see each day.

You are a good team. The integration process has just begun, and the Directorate will have a vital role to play and the continuity of your BiH cannot afford to lose the experience you have accumulated.

You have done much of the work to ensure that the negotiations for the SAA were successfully completed and were praised by the European Commission for your professionalism. I want to reiterate that praise.

You, the technical experts, have done your part of job, the European Union likewise. What remains outstanding is a job that BiH's political leaders must complete, that is agreement on a single technical reform: Police reform.

Let me remind everyone; including Police reform as a requirement for signing the SAA was not imposed. All sides in BiH and its Entities took on this obligation in October 2005. Now is the time to fulfil that obligation. The European Union expects that, and the citizens of this country expect that.

The hard fact is that the countries that have joined the European Union expressed the political will to do so and then applied themselves to the enormous challenge of harmonising their systems of government and economy to the requirements of *the Aquis Communautaire*.

This is a tried and tested development strategy – it was successful for all new EU Member States and there is absolutely no reason why it should not work for BiH.

Yet as we can see some of the country's political leaders have not yet decided whether they actually want to join the European Union. They have accepted the obligations, but have done nothing to fulfil them. Each time it is International Community that has to be the one to come up with a proposal. And what is the reaction – rejection and finger pointing. Naturally towards the International Community.

For some politicians in BiH, police reform is an opportunity to deal with genocide, for some politicians this reform is the start of the Constitutional reform process. Unfortunately, none of them sees police reform as the entry ticket to Europe. Though that is where the EU sees a resolution to the issue.

Political leaders in all the countries that choose to join the Europe had to persuade their people that integration was the way to go.

It seems that in Bosnia and Herzegovina some politicians believe that it should be the other way around – that the European Union should be the one to persuade them that integration is the way to go! I have to disappoint them. That will not happen. The EU exists and functions without BiH. The question is if and to what extent BiH could successfully function and exist without the EU.

During my discussions in Brussels last week my partners kept asked me how was it possible that BiH's politicians cannot see the huge difference in the relevance of a technical reform, that is what police reform actually is, and the strategic question of European integration. They could not understand how any politician – if he is serious in his views about the European future – could have any dilemma with over that choice.

During these discussions three points were constantly repeated:

- European policymakers want Bosnia and Herzegovina to be a stable and prosperous democracy inside the European Union. In other words, the EU does not want Bosnia and Herzegovina to be an unstable and poverty-stricken, a failing state outside the Union.

- They want to help this country do what is necessary to get back onto the path of integration.

- At the same time the EU will NOT relax the conditions that have been set for Bosnia and Herzegovina to move forward – to do so would simply negate the point of the exercise.

The SAA process involves making Bosnia and Herzegovina more like the rest of Europe; the rest of Europe isn't going to be changed just because some leaders in BiH cannot make up their minds about priorities.

The country must speak with one voice: this is what the EU is looking for. And that voice should reflect the will of the people who want integration, and not isolation.

This requires political will to reach agreement on Police Reform. The Protocol I have put forward provides the best way to build agreement.

I strongly believe that a good Proposal is one that fulfils the three European principles, and one that has a chance of being accepted by all three Parliaments in this country.

With regard to the three European principles: How many times do I have to repeat what Commissioner Rehn said to me? The European Commission is the one that defined the three principles; therefore it is the European Commission that has the right to interpret them. Why BiH politicians get involved in the European Commission's job rather than doing their own is unclear. Their job is to reach an agreement.

The benefits of EU integration are crystal clear – from freedom of movement for BiH citizens to a massive influx of development funds for new roads and hospitals and factories, to the steady improvement of public services.

The country's political leaders must realise the urgency of the task facing them and realise that this allows them to work out the remaining constitutional and political problems facing Bosnia and Herzegovina inside – not outside – the Europe.

Put simply reaching agreement will unblock Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration path and it will revive the country's overall recovery.

If they fail to reach agreement then it cannot be 'business as usual'. And again, let's get this straight. It does not mean that anyone is threatening BiH with sanctions and isolation. Isolation would be self imposed the choice of this country's political leadership, and its responsibility. If everyone in

your region is going towards the European Union, then the ones that took the decision not to chose isolation for their country and its citizens.

I am certain that the citizens in the countries of this region are no more hardworking, smarter, or more educated than you. Why then are they all making progress towards the EU, but you are standing still? You should not ask for the answer in Brussels.

If we can not find enough political will, wisdom and responsibility to unblock the road, then the International Community will have to take a different approach to the political process in BiH. I hope that this will not be necessary. We shall find out soon.

But if we can unblock the road – and I believe we can – then Bosnia and Herzegovina can do what the rest of Europe wants: move closer to the EU.

In conclusion allow me to reiteration once more: there is no alternative to European integration for BiH into Europe

The question is how much time will we loose before until relevant people understand that.

You, here, have no any dilemma about this issue. That is why I propose you to continue with your work and do everything, in the technical and administrative fields, to prepare Bosnia and Herzegovina for the challenges of Europe. Let me assure you that we will continue with our help and support. Thank you for your attention.