

**"THE EU INTEGRATION ASPIRATIONS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:
THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES?"
ADDRESS BY EUSR REPRESENTATIVE, DAN REDFORD,
TO THE UNIVERSITY OF BANJA LUKA, 14 MAY 2013, BANJA LUKA**

Honourable professors and honourable students of the University of Banja Luka,

Good afternoon!

In thanking the Vice Rector Professor Saula, for her very kind introduction, can I begin, first of all, by thanking all of you for allowing me this opportunity to talk with you today.

I should say before I go any further that when I used to sit where you are now and was told by my professors that a "guest speaker" would be addressing us, I would usually think to myself something like "oh dear me, so what are they trying to sell us now?"

[Pause]

So just for your noting, over the next few minutes, I do not intend to sell you anything!

Your teachers have, I am sure, been encouraging you to take in a wide breadth of opinions and views from a vast array of sources so that you can think for yourself.

So that you form your own views as to which direction you, your family, your local communities and your country takes.

I can only but endorse wholeheartedly such an approach.

Indeed, as I believe the Rector of this University, Professor Stanic, once wrote,

"...No objective knowledge can be absolute, in the sense that it cannot be questioned".

Therefore, all I plan to do today, with your indulgence, is to flag up a few of the many reasons why I think BiH membership of the European Union will directly benefit you and why progress in this respect has not been without its difficulties to date.

And as I am reliably informed that, you tend not to be shy and retiring group when you guests coming to speak, I am looking forward to responding, as best I can, to some of your concise, robust and tough questions and comments.

[Pause]

So, ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon, I would like to discuss with you an issue that I believe is important to you, your families and your local communities.

Namely – the integration of BiH into the EU.

So what is the current 'state of play'?

Well, essentially, this country needs to file a "credible" EU membership application with the European Commission.

And to do this, BiH would already need to be fully implementing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, a document that was signed with the EU some four years ago but which is not yet fully in force.

I will mention why a little later.

I want to stress first that this agreement is important.

It is important as it refers to the need for reform in many policy sectors that affect you and your families in areas like, the economy, the judiciary, education, and healthcare.

Such strategic reforms are needed so that BiH can one day function effectively inside the EU.

Once implementation of the Agreement is fully under way – and the reforms are being made, then BiH and the EU begin the long process of negotiating for full membership.

I should make it clear before we go on any further of one simple and undisputable fact:

We want BiH inside the EU.

We want all the young people of this country inside the EU.

We want YOU inside the EU

And this is a statement of fact that can never be over-emphasised.

However, for this to happen, your political leaders now need to show that they want it too!

[Pause]

Let us now pause for a moment to briefly look at the area of education.

We know that young people are this country's most important asset.

It's most valuable resource.

We know also that it will be the young people, people like you, who will be the ones who will enable this country to successfully meet the many challenges of the future.

That is why you need to ask...

No, I have that wrong, allow me to rephrase it differently for you...

You need to DEMAND from your political leaders that they provide you with real options.

You need to DEMAND that they consult with you on decisions that you will shortly need to make as fully grown adults with all the responsibilities that this entails.

You need to DEMAND to know what your chances are of obtaining an interesting and well paid job.

[Pause]

So here are just some of the ways in which the EU has improved the educational opportunities for students, like you, across all 27 EU member states.

Very many young Europeans profit from the opportunity to study in another member State – and more importantly - to have their credits and diplomas recognised all across Europe.

For example, if you were a Slovenian student and you wanted to study in London or in Paris, Vienna or Berlin for that matter, your university fees would be the same as those of a student whose country you wanted to study in.

You would also automatically receive full health insurance.

And when you graduated, if you decided to open your own business, you would immediately have full and unrestricted access to a market of circa 500 million people.

However, right now you can already reap some of the direct benefits now.

The Erasmus Mundus Programme is certainly one of Europe's most frequently used programmes.

It facilitates the emergence of a new generation of 'Europeans'.

This programme that provides the chance for 100 students each year from the region to enter postgraduate studies in any of the member States.

Yet, for some strange reason, the participation of BiH students in this programme is still remarkably low.

I would be interested in hearing your views on why this might be because there are many benefits of studying abroad.

Certainly, I would encourage anyone present – and to those who are not present as well - to find out more about the programme and then to apply!

[Pause]

So having completed a quick *tour de table* of the many ways that EU integration can benefit you directly, let us now take a look at the wider EU integration process here in BiH.

Since 1995, the EU has worked with the authorities at all levels, touching the lives of ordinary people

From Banja Luka to Mostar and from Bihac to Tuzla.

And so far, the EU has provided more than two billion Euros of support to BiH.

Indeed, most of the rebuilding of infrastructure and reconstruction of housing has been paid for from EU funds.

We have also provided important assistance in the institutional building of this country at all levels.

This has ranged from support to the judiciary, to reform of the political institutions and to the strengthening of the public administration.

The EU's focus on helping to strengthen reconciliation and regional co-operation has also been an important factor in helping the whole region to move forward.

[Pause]

So the EU's commitment to this region is clear.

So the EU's commitment to BiH as a country is clear.

So the EU's commitment to the young people of this country is clear.

However, the EU's commitment alone will not be enough.

Our commitment alone will not be able to ensure that sufficient progress is made in this country towards strengthening the business environment.

Our commitment alone will not be sufficient to fully foster economic growth.

Our commitment will not be enough if we do not also see the same level of political commitment, resolve and – most of all - action from the side of BiH political leadership.

We continue to be disappointed by the lack of leadership shown in making marked progress along the path of EU integration.

Indeed, one major ill that has perpetually damaged and stained the political landscape of this country has been the continual questioning of the actual viability of BiH as a country.

Such damaging language only serves to deflect political leaders from focussing on the real issues that affect real people.

Let me put it to you even more simply:

Put yourself in the mindset of a foreign investor, and ask yourself this very simple question:

Would you risk investing your own money into a country whose existence is repeatedly brought into question by some of the very same officials who actually claim to lead it?

Ladies and gentlemen, the short and unequivocal answer to this question has to be a clear and resounding 'NO!'

[Pause]

So why is the Agreement, I mentioned earlier, still not in force?

What needs to be done to make the Agreement become operational?

Well, first of all, BiH needs to show credible efforts in implementing the *Sejdic-Finci* ruling.

This will allow the EU Member States to put the previously mentioned SAA fully into force.

Once this has been achieved, the EU will start to monitor the track record of implementation.

Then BiH could credibly apply for EU membership.

The issue of *Sejdic-Finci* is about building a democracy based on respect for the human rights of all citizens.

It is an issue that goes to the very heart of what respect for European values really means.

It has been an issue that has dominated political debate for long and yet, so far, without any tangible conclusion.

It means that the authorities must now eliminate discrimination from the elections process.

Simply put, every BiH citizen must have the right to stand for elections.

It is possible that another set of elections that violate European Convention on Human Rights could seriously undermine legitimacy of elected bodies of the country.

Failure to do so will mean that BiH will continue to lag far behind its neighbours in terms of the European integration process.

It will also mean that BiH is not able to take any further steps forward. BiH's path to the EU will be effectively frozen if the *Sejdić-Finci* ruling is not implemented.

And it will have been 'frozen', so to say, not by the actions of the EU – but by the actions – or should we better say 'inactions' - of the political class in this country.

A second prerequisite for the SAA to come into force will also be the establishment of an effective and functional co-ordination mechanism on EU affairs.

Such a mechanism that would enable the country to speak with one voice to us.

While the EU is here to negotiate and to mediate between different levels of authority in BiH, there has to be one voice in BiH on EU-related issues.

And this voice has to be co-ordinated as well.

[Pause]

Ladies and gentlemen,

With Croatia becoming an EU member in only six weeks from now.

And with Montenegro, Serbia, and hopefully also Macedonia, starting negotiations with the EU soon

There is clear evidence that the EU enlargement process is working!

We stand with the overwhelming majority of citizens in BiH who want to be inside the EU.

They believe, when asked, that EU membership will bring about positive change to their daily lives:

More money 'in their pocket'!

More and better paid jobs!

And a whole lot less corruption!

And we think they are right too!

Indeed, the recent historic agreement between Pristina and Belgrade sent a clear, resolute and strong message across the entire region, including BiH:

That moving beyond the stale old conflicts of the past and instead moving closer to a 'European future' can and is achievable.

The agreement showed determination, courage, wisdom, the ability to look to the future - well beyond any short term partisan self interest.

Most of all, it showed a genuine willingness to compromise.

'Food for thought' surely when we then look at the current state of the political scene here.

Your political leaders are not fulfilling their obligations to you.

And they are not fulfilling their obligations to the EU.

[Pause]

Let me put it another way:

If BiH was a football team, they would be sitting firmly at the bottom of the league battling hard with relegation, with only a handful of games to go.

And if 'Team BiH' wishes to retain its supporters - i.e. you and your families,

They will need to start playing as 'one team' and to stop arguing with each other while the game is in on!

And, ladies and gentlemen, the game is most definitely 'on'.

So the real question at stake is this:

Will BiH be able to catch up?

We want BiH inside the European Union.

We know that the vast majority of people in BiH want this too!

The real issue at stake now:

Is whether your politicians want what you want:

To have more money 'in the pockets' of ordinary citizens!

To have more and better paid jobs!

And to see a lot less corruption!

[Pause]

But, since I am not from this region.

So let us give the last word on this matter to a former Serbian Prime Minister, and also former student leader, the late Zoran Djindjic, when he once famously said:

"I represent a generation that knows about life in the West and the rest of the world, people who want to do everything possible so that we become a normal European country."

[Pause]

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your time.

ENDS

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY