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EXTENSION - HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE	
<p>The local authorities issued a decree announced over the radio in Prijedor stating that anyone with no religious beliefs, ethnicity and/or opinions must wear a white arm band. The year was 1942 and the location was somewhere in central Europe. We moved to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, just three hours by air from Prijedor. One of the worst crimes against humanity in history - genocide - was returning to Europe, despite us swearing "never again!" after the Holocaust and World War II. Neighbour turning against neighbour, people herded into concentration camps, women interned in special camps where mass rape was common and so on. This all happened in the heart of Europe within our lifetime, just 50 years after the Holocaust.</p> <p>My parents insist that genocide and ethnic cleansing would never have happened if Bosnia and Herzegovina had been a member of the EU. I am convinced that they are right. The European Union has successfully maintained stable peace for the last 60 years within its own territory. In fact, it is even referred to as the "peace project", with nations, states and people accepting that conflict is best resolved through common institutions instead of on the battlefield or in concentration camps. The expansion of the EU has led to an enormous feeling of freedom for people who have never really known freedom. Millions of former inmates of the prison behind the Iron Curtain could suddenly travel freely, work and study anywhere in the EU. The whole continent became their home. This is a feeling that can only be described as fantastic. And that's why the peace and freedom project that is the EU must continue to expand. Even my old homeland of Bosnia and Herzegovina will be guaranteed a stable future, free of military conflict and genocide. When we tear down the borders between states, understanding, solidarity and common interest arise. Those are excellent reasons for being able to live together in peace and harmony. When all the member states of the former Yugoslavia - including Bosnia and Herzegovina - have joined the EU, we can ensure lasting peace in the Balkans.</p> <p>The new young generation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has no personal memories of the war in the 90s. They want to look forward, to a better future within the EU. They want to travel, study and work in their Europe. My grandmother belongs to the generation that lived through the Second World War and the Balkan War in the 90s. She wants to leave behind a Bosnia and Herzegovina in which future generations can grow up in schools and read books instead of fleeing war and oppression. Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans face major problems that can best be resolved together, by keeping the doors of the European Union open for new members. By doing so, we can finally make the dreams of my grandmother's and the new generation come true.</p> <p>An expanded EU will also counter the antidemocratic forces which still threaten unity in the Balkans. When minorities such as LGBTs, Roma, Jews and other ethnic groups find it hard to express themselves, the EU warns current and potential candidate countries aware of the consequences. Its role as a watchdog for human rights and democratic principles is a demonstration of the positive influence the EU has in the Balkans. And that is why it is so</p>	



important that expansion continues. The terms of membership must be fulfilled, and must include respect for human rights. The expansion process gives the EU strong influence in the Balkans to ensure that the Balkan nations fulfil the terms of membership and thus the most important aspects of democracy. That's how to meet the challenges of the future - with openness and collaboration.

I do not want to see future generations have to grow up in conflicts that tear apart families, cities, states and the community, that stoke the fires of hate and lead to yet more conflicts. I want long-lasting peace and stability for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other Balkan states. That's why the continued expansion of the EU peace project is the right way forward in my opinion. It is simply the best way of dealing with our problems now and in the future. We can then really live up to the cry of "never again" after Prijedor and Srebrenica.