

Brussels, 10 March 2010

## **We can work together to bring Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European family**

As the European Union's Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, I am personally committed to the European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I look forward to working together with the citizens and authorities from the very outset of my five-year mandate to achieve this common goal. I believe that the future of the country is within the EU.

**Fifteen years after the end of the war, we have to look ahead.** Today's Bosnia and Herzegovina is very different than the one of 15, 10 or 5 years ago. And the Bosnia and Herzegovina that would join the EU will be very different from the one we see today. It is towards that country, strong, and self confident in sharing the same values with the EU, that I look forward to working for with my counterparts.

The EU enlargement policy is based on a comprehensive approach that ensures new members are admitted only when they are ready to take upon themselves both the rights of EU members but also the obligations that come with them. Experience of previous enlargements showed us that the prospect of EU accession can act as a powerful incentive to reform. But the reform can only be made in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not in Brussels. It is true though that reform at home will bring you good results in Brussels as well.

**We already have a good example where reform at home will be worth your effort:** the roadmap towards the visa-free regime. The perspective of your citizens travelling freely to Europe is not a gift from Brussels, but the result of determined action by your government, supported by a broad consensus between all political parties. This collective effort will bring tangible benefits to the citizens: closer economic ties, scholarships and cultural exchanges.

The visa liberalisation process is a good example of how the speed of EU integration depends on the pace of reform. The same thing happened with the signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2008 which enabled us to move forward. It is important that this kind of political engagement and consensus is built around all the reforms supporting the EU membership aspiration. This is a pre-condition for the country to move from a post-Dayton mind set to a European one.

**Much progress has been done, but much more is still needed.** Bringing the Constitution in line with the European Convention for Human Rights is a crucial step for the country, as to allow minorities to participate fully in the electoral process. The Law on Census has to be adopted, otherwise Bosnia Herzegovina will be the only country in the region where a Census will not be held in 2011. The census of 2011 is crucial for the economic and social planning and development of each country and for Europe as a whole. Finally, legislation has to be implemented to help the country come out of the current economic downturn. All these are issues that, when addressed, will bring Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to Europe.

**2010 is an election year.** This event should be a celebration of democracy. These elections should be about this new European mindset. There is no place for nationalistic rhetoric, which separates people along ethnic or religious lines. During the pre-election period, we will continue to work with you to advance the reforms needed. Free and fair elections, in which

all citizens of the country can elect and be elected like in any EU Member State is the stamp of democracy in your passport to the EU. Don't miss the opportunity to have such a stamp.