

No time to lose. Now is the time to act

Elections are a celebration of democracy and so were indeed those held in October. The time of elections also gives people the opportunity to decide on the kind of future they want for themselves and for the generations to come. Fifteen years after the end of the war it is time to move on from the past, into the future. We have given our commitment that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the European Union; but you need to make this happen.

Too much time has been lost through divisive rhetoric; too much energy has been diverted from much-needed reforms. The Western Balkans as a region is on track and steadily advancing towards its final destination of EU membership. I urge Bosnia and Herzegovina not to miss this train.

If ever proof was needed of light at the end of the tunnel or that reform is first and foremost in your interest as citizens, yesterday's news should serve that purpose. Short-term visa requirements for citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina travelling to the Schengen countries are to be lifted. This success has been achieved through the efforts of your government to implement reforms in border management and law enforcement. This achievement shows that when there is a will, political leaders can find the consensus needed to deliver tangible results.

This spirit of consensus must now be extended to tackle EU-related reforms. While good progress was made in regional reconciliation and cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the country has done little to meet the requirements for closing the Office of High Representative. The prevalence of ethnically motivated considerations continues to hamper the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. The process for changing the Constitution to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights has not been initiated. Justice reform and the implementation of the war crimes strategy have stagnated. Intimidation of journalists has increased. Corruption persists.

A state-level census has yet to be adopted. The last census conducted in your country was in 1991 and next year all of Europe will carry out the exercise. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to do the same not just to respect EU rules but because the information this provides is key to implementing sound policies. We expect a single, country-wide census, as this is the only form that is statistically viable and can benefit all of you as citizens.

A shared vision by your leaders on the direction of the country and the collective will to meet the requirements of integration are essential for further progress towards the EU. Key reforms must be accelerated. The country's institutions need to increase their efficiency. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to be in a position to adopt, implement and enforce EU laws and rules. When it comes to EU-related issues, the country needs to send a coherent message and to speak with one voice. This will make further progress towards the European Union much easier.

The opportunity to build consensus and to pick up the pace of reforms must be seized now. It is high time for Bosnia and Herzegovina to embark on the key reforms that are needed for its own good as well as to match its EU ambitions. We are ready to reinforce our engagement to your European vision. Are you?

Štefan Füle

Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

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