

Time to deliver

The past year has seen major progress by a number of Western Balkan countries on their road towards the EU. Croatia is moving purposefully towards joining the EU on 1 July 2013, accession negotiations have started with Montenegro, and Serbia has received Candidate Status. In geographic terms, these developments are bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina closer and closer to the EU. The question that for me needs to be answered is whether Bosnia and Herzegovina is going to follow in its neighbours' footsteps, transforming this geographic proximity to the EU into a material proximity with the EU that would bring increasingly tangible benefits for its citizens. The alternative is worrying, of being increasingly cut off from key developments in Europe, and allowing a negative impact to the daily life of its citizens and businesses to build up.

Let me be clear: the EU wants Bosnia and Herzegovina to become its member. Visa-free travel, intensified trade flows, more than 2.8 billion euro of EU financial assistance since 1995 as well as bilateral support from the EU Member States are only a few examples of our engagement. To move closer to the EU politically and to keep up with neighbours, it is however for Bosnia and Herzegovina to take the main steps, beginning by setting the EU agenda as a national priority and demonstrating it strongly in deeds.

In June, Bosnia and Herzegovina's main political representatives agreed on an EU roadmap with clear milestones to be reached to allow the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and submission of a credible membership application. Their failure to reach agreement on the modalities to appoint members of the Presidency is a pity, because at the end of the day it is the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina that suffer from the delays in integrating with the EU and missed opportunities for interaction with other Europeans.

The path of any country towards EU membership is one of dialogue and compromise. We stand with the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to help you to travel this road. But your political leaders have to do their part. There is no viable alternative to future EU membership. Countries bordering Bosnia and Herzegovina have realised that long time ago. The time to move the EU agenda forward in Bosnia and Herzegovina is now. This is a task for your political representatives and nobody else can do it in their place. The European Commission remains ready to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina with every step on its path to the European Union.

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