

Bosnia and Herzegovina towards European Union

The process of negotiations leading to signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between BiH and the EU started in 2005. Two years later the Agreement was initialled, following the adoption of policing laws, which has set the country on the long-awaited path of EU integration. The signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in the coming weeks will be an important step forward for BiH, but there are still a number of key tasks that need to be completed before the country becomes a member of the EU. Now the time before the signing ceremony must be used to prepare for implementation of this international, legally binding agreement.

The fact of the matter is, even once the SAA is signed, that the road shall not become easier, but BiH will need to start preparations in order to be granted a candidate status. This will be possible only if the current impatience to sign the SAA will be translated into actions to quickly complete the reforms that will lead to full EU membership. For all levels of governance involved in this process it is very important to assume own commitments and to increase their capacities. The success of the BiH integration process is firmly linked, inter alia, to the public's level of awareness and understanding of the European Union and its structure, institutions and policies, as well as of the essence of the Stabilisation and Association process.



It is constructive that 80% of BiH citizens positively responded when asked if they wish that BiH joins the EU (research conducted by UNDP). The Public Information Programme on European Integration Process, which is an integral part of the framework document «EU Integration Strategy of BiH», sets out the main principles and objectives for communicating with the public, tasks and functions of the institutions taking part in that process. Directorate of European Integration of BiH, as a permanent body of the BiH Council of Ministers, has been entrusted with the mandate to coordinate and organise the overall information activities related to the European integration, one of the activities of the Promotion Department involves regular dissemination of information to the public concerning all activities related to the process of the European integration by the use of the web page, public statements, press conferences, interviews, press statements, publications, etc.

A proactive approach of the DEI is reflected in a number of seminars being organised to deal with various aspects of European integration. In the light of forthcoming signing of SAA the activities on the promotion of European integration are intensified. A number of round tables "Together with Europe" were held in almost all municipalities throughout BiH. The importance of these events was proven by great turnout of citizens, mayors of host towns, NGOs and in particularly through active participation of the Ambassadors of EU countries.



Also, in this context it is important to mention one day conference on topic "Europeisation of BiH" organised by DEI within the project "EU Technical Support to BiH Institutions", held in Sarajevo on 23 April this year. The main goal of the organiser was to illustrate and make more visible the core values of the European Union to BiH citizens. Participants of this conference were numerous representatives of BiH institutions, international organisations, academic community, as well as non-governmental organisations. In its introductory remarks Mr. Osman Topcagic, director of DEI said that term "Europeisation" should be defined as synonym for the changes in the country caused by European integration process. He emphasised that signing of SAA represent the first contractual relation between BiH and the EU and that SAA would enable EU to launch a visa dialogue with BiH and certainly access to the largest market, where import and export of products would be done without current obstacles. H.E. Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas, Head of the Delegation of the European Commission in BiH stated that it is very important that political leaders achieved an agreement on a platform that will enable the implementation of SAA. At the end, we can conclude that BiH must remain firm in its commitment to become part of the European family.

Provided by Sandra Malesic
Bosnia & Herzegovina, May 2008
mailto: s.malesic@mpr.gov.ba