

BiH Dayton Project



Press statement of Commissioner Várhelyi after the High-Level Political Forum in Sarajevo

 June 4, 2024

The EU Delegation to BiH issued the [press statement](#) of Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, which is reprinted below.

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Check against delivery!

First of all, it is always a pleasure to be in Sarajevo and it is always a pleasure to be with **Chairwoman Krišto** because I think by now, she not only has demonstrated her commitment, but she is the leader Bosnia and Herzegovina needed for a long time because she is the leader who can and who dares to deliver. And I think she needs all the applauses for

that. I was very happy to see her continued determination today and also to see that the participants, I think, have been very clear on the direction of travel of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Yes, we are at a critical juncture today with very many positive decisions made in just recent past.

If you start from 2022, when this government took office, candidate status was granted based on the work made. Then decision was made by the European Council only this year to start accession negotiations; not even in two years.

So, I think that this also calls for a high level of responsibility by all leaders of the country. This is what we have discussed this afternoon at length, and I think that with these very positive decisions based on previous achievements, we should be able to go forward. For this to happen now, we need delivery, and the more you advance in the EU path, the more you have to deliver.

And I think that it is all very clear after our discussion today, what needs to be delivered by Bosnia and Herzegovina to move to the next stage.

It is very clear that if Bosnia Herzegovina wants to move to the next stage, it still needs to deliver on the 8 steps that have been reinforced by the decision of the European Council in March and to speed up the reforms in that regard. We have heard the high ambitions in this regard, and it is very clear which are the 4 most critical laws that needs to be delivered. This is what we have discussed, I think, in quite some detail today: the law on courts, the law on High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, the law on personal data protection and the law on border control. These are the steps which we will need, to be able to move to the next stage, at which the Council should be able to approve the so-called negotiating framework, which is the first step of the actual negotiations. On our side we are ready to propose this negotiating framework as a matter of urgency to the Council. Meanwhile, here in Sarajevo and also in Mostar and Banja Luka, everybody needs to work to help the country to deliver all this.

There's another issue which we discussed today and that is related to the Growth Plan and the so-called Reform Agenda. The Prime Minister already explained you a bit how the Growth Plan is going to be implemented.

The last time we were here, the Growth Plan was only a proposal of the Commission, and we were very optimistic that the European Council would adopt it within the mandate of our budget, which it has. In February this year, the European Council not only adopted it, but allocated significant funds, additional funds on top of the IPA, to deliver Europe even before accession to the Balkans.

It means that the citizens of this country will benefit earlier than joining actually the European Union from the benefits of the Single Market. It means that this country can benefit from a similar level of aid intensity that you see now in our own Member States, who are benefiting from Cohesion and Structural Funds.

But for this to happen, we need reinforced commitment on reforms, that is the Reform Agenda, which is going to be an annual exercise. And as you have seen the Growth Plan is going to be quite a fast forward running for the remainder of the multi annual financial framework period. Basically, it has to be implemented by the end of 2027.

So, this is why we made a strong point today, I think both the Prime Minister and I, that we need all institutions in the country to help to deliver not only on the setting up of this agenda, which is the basis of starting the implementation of the Growth Plan, but also to actually implement all the reforms that we agree on in this Reform Agenda.

And yes, the Prime Minister already alluded to the fact that the adoption of these agendas throughout the Balkans, where we are advanced as well, means the first payment. On our side we are ready to make the first payment still before the summer break. When it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is roughly around BAM 138 million that could arrive here to start the work on the reforms immediately.

But for this to happen, we also need a budget. This is another issue we discussed and I'm very hopeful that the political coalition will deliver this budget quickly so that we can move forward, because now is the time when we need the

whole country to deliver. Now is the time when we need everybody to take full ownership of the European path. Now is the time when the leaders of this country must deliver on what is an offer from Europe because the door is open. Europe is happy about the developments in terms of reform efforts up until the decision was made in the European Council, but now we need reinforced commitment by everybody instead of being distracted with the daily tit-for-tats in the country.

So, I'm looking forward to the emergence of this consensus because we have seen this working for a year and a half, and now we need to reinforce this. And this is why I've been pleading to everyone to come on board and help us to deliver Europe for Bosnia Herzegovina.

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