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**SPEAKING POINTS
PROGRAMME "PARLIAMENT FOR EUROPE"**

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Parliament for Europe
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It is a pleasure for me to be in Sarajevo today: a city that represents a crossroads of the European history. It is also a great pleasure to participate in this programme that wants to provide a forum for discussing the European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Let me say very clearly that Bosnia and Herzegovina has been and continues to be at the centre of our political attention and a focus of our enlargement policy.

I really believe that the perspective of becoming member of the European Union does represent for your country THE key strategic choice to achieve stability and prosperity and to allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to finally turn the page of its difficult recent past.

If it is true that the European Union is clearly committed to your country's European future it is also true that your country's future and its European destiny are ultimately in your hands.

I really hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina moves decisively on its European integration path.

But this calls for a common vision of your future in the European Union and a shared desire to work together.

This calls for the end of the political stalemate that has dominated over the last six months, since the election.

This calls to spare no effort on progress which would have a positive impact on the country and the lives of your citizens.

This calls for constructive dialogue, consensus and respect; values on which the European Union is founded.

This calls for developing functional State institutions that can allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to speak with one voice when dealing with the EU.

I want to be clear on this point. This does not mean putting in jeopardy the existence of the Entities. It means that whilst many competences can remain at Entity level a coordination mechanism needs to be put in place at State level.

Take for example what has been done in the area of visa liberalisation. Bosnia and Herzegovina was able to agree on all the measures needed to meet the more than 150 benchmarks requested by the European Union.

You have managed to make it, turning this exercise into a win-win situation for the central state, the Entities, the Cantons, the Brcko District and, more than everybody else, for the citizens of this country.

I want to use this opportunity to call on all political parties to show this same determination and reach an agreement on the formation of a State level government.

This what your citizens expect from you following the elections last October.

It is not up to the European Union to mediate. It is up to Bosnian political leaders to take the ownership of the process. And nothing will work unless ALL the parties want it.

Once there is a government in place, there are a number of priorities that need to be addressed. They all have a direct impact on your progress towards the European Union.

First, the Constitution needs to be amended to comply with the ruling of the European Court on Human Rights. Respect of minority rights and anti-discrimination are basic values for the EU.

Secondly, a state aid law needs to be adopted. This stems directly from the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the Interim Agreement. So it is necessary to ensure the compliance of your contractual obligations with the European Union.

Implementation of the obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement / Interim Agreement is key for a credible membership application to be considered by the EU.

Furthermore, the adoption of a state level census law will be important for Bosnia and Herzegovina's integration steps.

Progress is essential in the area of rule of law – addressing corruption and organised crime. Laws and strategies adopted under the visa dialogue are steps in right direction. Now efforts are necessary to ensure effective implementation. Experience from previous enlargements has shown how important it is to address these issues early in the accession process and with strong determination.

The European Union strongly supports the work of the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the State level Prosecutor's Office and the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council. The strengthening of the law enforcement agencies is also essential.

All these bodies provide an important contribution to ensuring the rule of law in the country in line with European standards.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to build a single economic space. This is particularly important in view of the European growth strategic objectives.

Within the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Commission intends to associate enlargement countries with initiatives taken at EU level to meet the goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The Small Business Act for Europe, a set of measures to improve the business environment for SMEs, is an example of such an initiative.

Addressing these issues - including transport and protection of the environment - will bring economic growth, competitiveness and jobs, particularly as your country recovers from the recent economic crisis.

In this process, the EU will continue to stand next to you, with expertise and financial support.

Reforms are needed also in the area of education. Links between employment and education policy need to be strengthened. More forward-looking and integrating approach to education is crucial to promote reconciliation efforts within Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in the whole Western Balkans region. I strongly believe that no form of segregation or discrimination should be accepted, particularly when applied to education policies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a solid EU membership perspective. You have taken courageous and important steps,

together with your neighbours, towards regional reconciliation and cooperation.

Visa free travel represented a major step in breaking down barriers between Bosnian and EU citizens. It has brought new opportunities especially for young people, students, artists and for businesses.

Time has come for political leaders to take full ownership for the future of this country. They need to build this future based on consensus, dialogue and mutual respect thus laying the foundations for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become member of the European Union.

You can count on our continued support in this endeavour.

The European Union will soon appoint a Head of EU Delegation in Sarajevo who will also become an EU Special Representative. Therefore, there will be a single EU Office which will be ready to help you through its reinforced presence and policies. We will also continue providing Bosnia and Herzegovina with substantial financial assistance.

Dear colleagues, dear friends this is the moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina to make a strategic choice: the choice of embracing the road of political dialogue and all together undertake the path leading to EU accession.

2011 will be a very important year for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The region is on the move. And we want Bosnia and Herzegovina to move forward as well. We want Bosnia and Herzegovina to be part of this success story that we are writing together with the people of this region.

Thank you