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Bosnia and Herzegovina Signed Stabilisation and Association Agreement with European Union

In Luxemburg on 16 June 2008 Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the **Stabilisation and Association Agreement** and the Interim Agreement with the European Union. Slovenian Foreign Minister, **Dimitrij Rupel** signed the agreement on behalf of the EU Presidency, Enlargement Commissioner **Olli Rehn** on behalf of the European Commission, and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina **Nikola Špirić** on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina in presence of BiH Presidency Chairman **Haris Silajdzic**, BiH Foreign Minister **Sven Alkalaj** and EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy **Javier Solana**.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement will come into force upon the ratification by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, European Parliament and national parliaments of the EU Member States. In the meantime, the Interim Agreement, covering primarily trade and trade-related matters, will come into force on 1 July 2008.



EUROPE DAY CELEBRATION • Gala Concert - Sarajevo • Celebrations throughout entire Bosnia and Herzegovina • Streetball challenge basketball – Sarajevo • Largest EU flag in Jajce • Voyage to Europe rafting – Doboj • Culture, Art and Sport events – Trebinje



Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas, Head of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Today is a very special day for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I wholeheartedly congratulate citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its political leadership on this very important achievement. Signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and of the Interim

Agreement with the European Union is an important step on the country's road to the European Union. It is both beneficial and a challenging road requiring lots of efforts by Bosnia and Herzegovina. The European Union will continue to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to make further progress on its path to Europe.”



Ollie Rehn, European Commission's Enlargement Commissioner

Today is an important day for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union. I congratulate the citizens and leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina on today's signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. It is a milestone that marks a new stage in our relations, and the gateway to eventual candidacy.

The SAA will bring concrete benefits to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and promote reforms that will generate economic growth and help create jobs and better living standards.

Much hard work lies to implement the SAA. Laws must to be passed and institutions strengthened. So, dear friends, this is no time to rest upon the laurels. It is important to keep up the good momentum and build a genuine consensus on EU-related reforms.

Still: today is a day to celebrate. It is a great European day for Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Nikola Spiric, Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers

This is a very important day for me and I am glad to share happiness and pride with all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who have been waiting for this moment for so long. The SAA means that the door of the European future is open for our country. I am glad that we are going to work together on the better future and prosperity of BiH citizens.

Also, this means that we are going to fulfil the conditions of the SAA and work on the improvement of life of BH citizens and their standards. We do hope that by doing so we will create safer environment for those interested in investing in BiH, that visa regime will be changed, and that BiH will be capable of meeting all requirements defined in the SAA and that it will become fully fledged member of the European Union.”

About Stabilisation and Association Agreement

What are the main areas covered by a Stabilisation and Association Agreement?

The SAAs are modelled on the Europe Agreements with the Central and Eastern European countries, while containing also specificities such as the obligation for regional co-operation and provisions on Justice and Home Affairs matters.

Each SAA covers the implementation of the same core tasks, while some aspects can be tailored individually to each Western Balkan country.

Especially important areas covered by a SAA are:

- the establishment of political dialogue;
- the promotion of regional co-operation;
- the establishment of a free trade area between the specific country and the EU;
- mutual concessions concerning the “four freedoms”: movement of workers, establishment, supply of services, and movement of capital;
- the approximation of the legislation of a specific country to Community law, including precise rules in the fields of competition, intellectual property rights and public procurement;
- wide-ranging co-operation in all areas of EU policies, including in the area of justice and home affairs.

Roadmap on Visa Free Travel Opens EU Doors to BiH

European Commission Vice President **Jacques Barrot**, in charge of Justice, Freedom and Security, welcomed the transmission of the Roadmap on visa liberalisation to Sven Alkalaj, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a ceremony which took place in Sarajevo on 5 June, 2008. The Roadmap gives clear indications to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the measures that need to be taken in order to grant visa free travel to all its citizens.

"I attach the greatest importance to facilitating people to people contacts in particular for the younger generation. I am convinced that easy travel conditions will increase mutual understanding and improve our relations in all fields. The roadmap on visa facilitation is certainly another important step towards the EU integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

"Yet, the roadmap offers more advantages to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina", VP Barrot continued, "as it will encourage the country to continue implementing the relevant reforms and reinforcing cooperation at regional level and with the EU in areas such as strengthening the rule of law, fighting organised crime and corruption."

The EU sent another strong message of openness/encouragement to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina when on 28 January 2008 the General Affairs and External Relations Council invited the Commission to present detailed roadmaps setting clear benchmarks to be met by all the countries in the region in order to gradually advance towards visa



Michael Leigh, General Director of General Directorate of the European Commission for Enlargement handing over the Road Map to BiH Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj

liberalisation. On 26 May 2008, the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Bosnia and Herzegovina was launched. The Roadmap presented officially on 5 June, 2008 is a concrete step towards visa liberalisation.

Background

The Roadmap identifies four sets of issues to be covered by the dialogue: document security, illegal migration, public order and security as well as external relations and fundamental rights items linked to the movement of persons. Key elements of the blocks include: improvement of document security and in particular the introduction of biometrics in travel documents, better management of migratory risks, efficient law enforcement cooperation including cooperation with Europol and enhanced measures to fight against organised crime and corruption.

The dialogue will allow each country to focus reform efforts and address the EU's requirements. The speed of movement towards visa liberalisation will depend on the progress made by each of the countries in fulfilling the conditions set.

Concerning the structure, the dialogue will be conducted by senior officials who could decide to organise technical meetings at expert level for specific items. The Commission will report regularly to the Council on the implementation of the Roadmap. The whole process will allow the Commission to make a proposal at the appropriate moment to the Council for the lifting of the visa obligation for citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



What are the main benefits for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Enhanced political stability and security due to good neighbourly relations, regional co-operation, and deeper integration into the EU.

Economic development through enhanced trade and economic co-operation and the creation of a business environment providing for investments, encouraging individual entrepreneurial initiatives and generating employment.

Progress in the process of political and economic reforms, including in the areas of institution building, public administration reform, respect of human rights and the rule of law, which are necessary to improve significantly the quality of life for all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



-  Candidate countries
-  Potential candidate countries

Michael Leigh Ended Two Day Visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina



Head of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, H.E. **Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas** chaired the press conference on Thursday June 05, 2008, at the end of a two-day visit of Mr. **Michael Leigh**, General Director of General Directorate of the European Commission for Enlargement. Ambassador Kourkoulas briefly informed media representatives about Mr. Leigh's meetings with Chairman of the BiH Presidency Mr. Haris Silajdžić, Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers, Mr. Nikola Špirić, and High Representative/European Union Special Representative, Ambassador Miroslav Lajcak.

During the press conference, Mr. Leigh underlined that two main reasons of his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina were to review progress of BiH along its path to EU membership and to handover

the Road Map for Visa liberalisation for BiH citizens. Mr. Leigh emphasized that it was important for BiH authorities to draw up an action plan for implementing the obligations under the SAA. *The success of the country in carrying out its obligations under the SAA would be a crucial element in determining the speed by which it progresses towards the EU membership*, added Mr. Leigh.

"I hope very much that these concrete three steps: the signature of the SAA, entry into force of the Interim Agreement on 1 July, 2008, and the start of progress on the visa Road Map will help to make the prospect of EU membership for BiH more visible and tangible for its population.", said Mr. Leigh and added that now it was up to BiH authorities to deliver on implementation and enforcement of these different instruments.

Mr. Leigh also participated in the European Union Police Mission's conference on security sector reform. He used the opportunity to emphasise that BiH was entering the moment of implementation of police reform, therefore *„full commitment of local authorities to implementation of police reforms was extremely important."*, said Mr. Leigh.

As a part of further development of civil society, Delegation of European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina organised a meeting for Mr. Michael Leigh and representatives of academia and NGO's active in civil society development. *"We wish to strengthen democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina by increasing cooperation with civil society."* said Mr. Leigh.

Reform Process Monitoring – 12th Session held in Banja Luka



On 12 June 2008, **Dirk Lange**, Head of Unit for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina within the European Commission Directorate General for Enlargement attended the 12th session of Reform Process Monitoring (RPM) which took place in Banja Luka. The issues discussed at the plenary session of the RPM were reconciliation and regional cooperation, strengthening of administrative capacity, visa and border management, fight against organised crime and corruption and judicial system. The assessment was also made on the progress related to, information society and media, education, research and social policy.

Speaking at the press conference, Mr. Lange said that the issues related to judiciary and security, addressed at the meeting, would be further monitored through the dialogue on visa regime liberalisation. He reminded that BiH's signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement on Monday (16 June) in Luxembourg was a crucial step for BiH on its path to the EU and pointed out to the importance of the moment to accelerate the passage of laws

and their harmonisation with the EU legislation. *"This meeting was an opportunity to assess the progress in BiH, to exchange the views, what will be included in our progress report"*, said Mr. Lange and emphasized that progress was made in certain areas.

The Director of BiH Directorate for European Integration Mr. **Osman Topčagić** said that BiH would face a progressive harmonisation of the EU legislation with the domestic one and consistent implementation of the Agreement (SAA), in order for the country to meet all obligations in a six-year transitional period. *"Should we want to move quickly towards candidacy status, and I believe we all do want, we need to meet the obligations arising from the SAA and priorities set out in the European Partnership"*

The first task and duty, according to Mr. Osman Topčagić, would be the establishment of a new customs regime: *"This is the first specific task and obligation which we are supposed to meet and implement from the SAA. New customs duties shall be applied to the imported goods from the EU."*

Within his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Lange he attended the inauguration of Euro-Info Centre whose aim was to provide access to EU related information to the citizens. *"We all do talk about the significance of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, and everyone tells that it is crucial for BiH, but the question is whether BiH's citizens have the information why it is so important and why EU finds it important."* said Mr. Lange and underlined the importance for BiH's citizens to have the information about BiH's EU integration process.

Mr. Lange also visited the Forensic Department within the RS Ministry of Interior in Banja Luka and attended the official opening of the World Rafting Cup that took place on on main city square in Banja Luka on Friday, June 13, 2008.



New Premises of the European Commission Delegation to BiH Officially Inaugurated

In the presence of distinguished guests, representatives of BiH authorities and international community, **Mr. Michael Leigh**, Director General of the EC Directorate General for Enlargement and H.E. **Mr. Haris Silajdžić**, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, officially inaugurated new premises of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo on Wednesday, 04 June 2008.

In his welcoming address, Head of the EC Delegation, **Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas** reminded the guests that the first office of the European Commission in BiH was opened in 1996, few weeks after the Dayton Peace Agreement had been signed. *"Today this office with almost 100 staff members is one of the biggest Commission Delegations in the world"*, said Ambassador Kourkoulas adding that the main objective of the European Commission was to *"assist the country in fulfilling the requirements for a full integration into the EU."* Having explained some main characteristics of the new building, Ambassador Kourkoulas concluded his speech addressing Mr. Silajdžić: *"Please consider this house not just as a friendly diplomatic mission but as your partner in the challenging road which will make BiH a part of our family."*

Addressing the audience, Mr. Leigh noted that according to his brief experience, the new building had two characteristics: transparency and light. *"I hope it will characterise our relations from now on"* said Mr. Leigh.

Following the addresses, Mr. Leigh and Mr. Silajdžić cut the ribbon and thus officially inaugurate the new building of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

About the Building

EC Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina occupies 2800m² of office space and 1200m² of meeting rooms, conference rooms, archives and common space. The construction started in December 2006 and was finalised in January 2008. The building complies with the highest EC standards and norms of safety and security. The building will soon host the office of the EUSR and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany.



Conference on the Role of the European Movement



The international conference „Role of the European Movement in Society and European integration process“ took place in Sarajevo on 16 April 2008. H.E. Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas**, Head of Delegation of the European Commission to BiH, addressed participants at the opening ceremony together with European Union Special Representative/High Representative, **Miroslav Lajcak** and ambassadors of the Republic of Slovenia, Republic of France, Republic of Germany and the Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH.

Reminding of the role that the European Movement International has played in the process of European integration by exercising its influence on European and national institutions and mobilising the people towards the EU, Ambassador Kourkoulas expressed his hope that the European Movement in BiH would find the strength to face that huge challenge. Civil society has a central role to play in the EU integration process of the candidate or potential candidate country and their transformation into modern European democracies, said Ambassador Kourkoulas and reiterated that the European Commission has put an emphasis on development of civil society dialogue in its Enlargement Strategy. EU financial support to civil society activities in the Western Balkans and Turkey will amount to

130 million Euro for the period 2008 - 2010.

Talking about the concrete benefits that citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina would have following the BiH signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, Ambassador Kourkoulas stressed five key areas: human rights protection and fight against the organised crime, free trade area, stable and predictable legal environment for potential EU investors, expansion of trade with EU that would lead to job creation and the fact that SAA would be a gateway to a candidate status. Once again, I just want to reiterate our commitment to European future of this country for the benefit of all its citizens, concluded Ambassador Kourkoulas.

Ambassador Miroslav Lajcak supported the work of the Conference adding that in the European Integration process, non-governmental sector had to be organised and capable to play active role in all process and to be reliable partner to the state.

The Conference was organised with the support of the Delegation of the European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Group of Visegrad and Embassies of the Republic of Slovenia, Republic of France, and Republic of Slovakia.

European Integration Training Provided to Around 1 200 Civil Servants



Closing conference of the EU funded European Integration Training Project took place on 21 April 2008 in Sarajevo. The results of the one-year long project implemented by East West Consulting in consortium with European Consultants and Euroluris was presented at the conference.

Within the scope of the project, 38 three-day courses were organised for around 1200 civil servants mainly on the state level, but also at Entity and Brčko District level, in order to provide civil servants with the basic knowledge about European Union, its institutions and policies, as well as the current state of accession process in BiH particularly emphasizing the role of public administration institutions in this process.

On behalf of the Delegation of European Commission to BiH, Mr. **Ferdinand Kopp**, Head of Operations Section for Justice and Home Affairs, pointed out that the success of this project was not based only on financial support but also on commitment of the civil servants who had participated in it. Mr. Kopp expressed his hope that

civil servants would continue upgrading their knowledge either through other EU funded project in the future or on their own initiative. He also mentioned that “European Union has invested significantly over the years in supporting trainings of civil servants and their capacities, and it will continue to do so in coming years.”

Director of the Civil Service Agency in BiH, Mr. **Jakob Finci** reminded that EU had been the ultimate goal of all political options in BiH for long time which had no alternative. Mr. Finci warned that the road to Europe was long and therefore: „We have to be ready when Europe invites us to join them, we have to have people who know how to work with Europe; this is the reason why we organised this training.“ said Mr. Finci.

The Conference was concluded by the ceremony of awarding certificates to the participants of the final course of this training programme.

European Union financed the European Integration Training Project in the amount of 500,000 Euro.



EUROPE DAY CELEBRATION



The Delegation of the European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina organised a series of events throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to bring the idea of European Union closer to citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and make them part of the Europe Day celebration. The celebration started on 5 and ended on 11 May including a variety of educational, cultural and sports events. This year the Delegation managed to include 25 cities, spread throughout the country, in the celebration of Europe Day while some of the events were clearly marked with the logo and slogan of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

Europe Day Gala Concert

On the evening of 9 May 2008 a gala concert was held in the BiH Institutions Building gathering representatives of local authorities, international community, NGOs, religious and cultural associations and the media. The concert was organised as a central ceremony of the Europe Day and was hosted by Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas**, Head of Delegation of the European Commission to BiH and Dr. **Nikola Špirić**, Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers.

In his welcoming speech, Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas underlined that the region's stabilisation, development and integration into European structures remained one of the Union's key priorities and BiH was at its core. His full speech is available on the next page.

Dr. Nikola Špirić welcomed the honoured guests and stressed out in his speech: "...it is necessary to double our efforts aimed at

fulfilling conditions for full membership in the European Union. And these efforts could be doubled only if we choose dialogue and compromise, if we learn to listen and respect each other as the member states of the European Union do. ...for progress [of Bosnia and Herzegovina] in the first place it is necessary to have patience, build internal trust and equality of all its citizens. And we will be dedicated to this."

In front of an audience of more than 400 invitees, Youth Symphony Orchestra of South Eastern Europe (YSOSEE) performed Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 - "Eroica". YSOSEE brings together young musicians from the whole region. Live broadcast on the nation-wide public broadcasters, BHT1 and BH Radio 1 gave an opportunity to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to enjoy the concert.

Speech by Ambassador Kourkoulas

Transmitted Live on BHT - 9 May 2008



Today we mark the anniversary of the declaration made in 1950, only five years after the most devastating war in human history, by the then French Foreign Minister, Robert Schumann. His vision of the new Europe was clear; his objectives simple yet ambitious: to establish a system of cooperation, starting with the economy, which will lead to reconciliation and peace. Without any hesitation, we can say today that Robert Schumann's vision has materialised, that his objectives have been achieved.

As a result, Europe is much safer and more prosperous. With 27 Member States and a population of close to half a billion, today's European Union is much stronger and more influential in our continent and beyond.

Yet, in a constantly changing world, Europe is facing many new challenges: globalisation, demographic shifts, climate change, need for sustainable energy sources and new security threats. No country can meet them alone. But acting as one, united in one Europe, European countries can deliver results and respond to the concerns of their citizens. For this, Europe needs to modernise its own structures. The recently signed Lisbon Reform Treaty is an important step in the history of European integration.

In half a century of existence, the European Union has proved to be a historic success. Its enlargement policy – notably the accession of the countries of central and Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007 – has undoubtedly contributed to stability and prosperity throughout the European continent. The invitation to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other countries of the region to become part of our family, once they meet the conditions, has opened a new perspective for the Western Balkans.

As you know, Bosnia and Herzegovina is only weeks away from the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU.

This will be the first contractual agreement between BiH and the EU and the first real step in the integration process, the process in which there are no shortcuts. Progress will depend on the political wisdom of policy makers and the general will of the BiH society to promote European values. Therefore, progress will only be achieved through action by Bosnia and Herzegovina – by its parliament, by its governments, by its political leaders. Equally importantly, progress will depend on the actions of civil society, the media, the business community, the youth, academia and society as a whole...Reforms must be made, hard decisions must be taken, and commitments must be honoured.

But ultimately these reforms are not needed to satisfy the European Union. They are needed for the benefit of your country and your own citizens.

That path will not always be an easy one. But rest assured that BiH will not be only in that road, and that the European Union will also be walking the journey as your partner. The EU has already allocated some 440 million euro between 2007 and 2011 for BiH. New opportunities for EU funding in the areas of regional, rural and human resource development shall rise with the proper implementation of the SAA.

New initiatives to support political and economic development in the Western Balkan countries have been decided recently: support to regional cooperation, increasing the number of scholarships, opening more community programmes as well as starting a dialogue to establish the conditions for lifting the visa requirements. The region's stabilisation, development and integration into European structures remains one of the Union's key priorities and BiH is at its core.

As many of you are aware, 2008 is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, an important opportunity to spread the Union's message of "united in diversity" – and specifically to promote intercultural dialogue as a means to make the most of the rich cultural diversity, one of our great assets. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a special role to play here. What makes this country truly European is not only its geographic location and its traditions, but also its rich cultural and religious diversity.

The EU will do everything in its power to help Bosnia and Herzegovina move closer to its European ambitions, so that united Europe can become the home for all citizens of this beautiful country. Robert Schumann's vision of European unity can become a source of inspiration, and I am convinced that it is united in your vision of this country that you will best be able to walk the path to integration.

Before giving the floor to the Youth Symphony Orchestra of the South Eastern Europe, I want to use this opportunity to thank all those citizens of BiH, our partners in the governments, parliaments, public administration, Judiciary, municipalities, Universities and schools, NGOs, the media – all those who have worked hard to promote the European values in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thank you for bringing the EU closer to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to the EU.





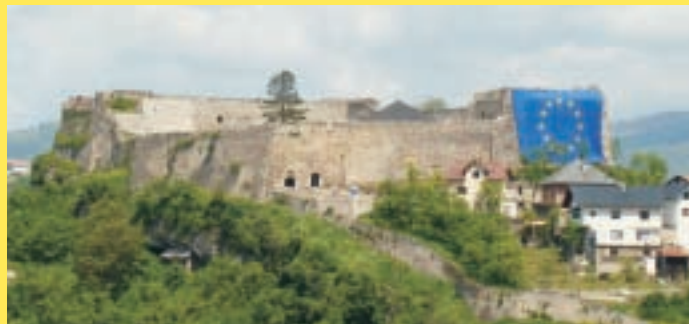
The final show of **EU Quiz** and award ceremony took place on 5 May. EU Quiz was a part of the EU Awareness project carried out in 21 municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participants were high school students from the whole of BiH. The EU Quiz included games covering topics such as "EU in 12 areas", "Myths and legends", "EU glossary". The winners of the EU Quiz, **Secondary School Gradiška**, won a 7-day study trip to Brussels. Mr. **Marc Vanbrabant**, First Counsellor of the Delegation of European Commission to BiH together with Mr. **Osman Topčagić**, Director of the Directorate for European Integration of BiH presented the awards to the winner teams.



Also within the EU Awareness project, the final game of the **Streetball challenge** competition for the high school students of the 21 municipalities – signatories of the Declaration of the European future of Bosnia and Herzegovina took place in Sarajevo on 9 May. Through six qualification games that were held in Prijedor, Brčko, Mostar, Zenica, Foča and Sarajevo, the best teams got placement in the finals. The winners in both male (**Secondary Technical School Banja Luka**) and female (**Secondary School of Economics**) competition won a 7-day study trip to Brussels. The awards were presented by Mr. **Michael Docherty**, representative of the EC Delegation to BiH and Mr. Osman Topčagić.



In **Doboj**, small town which straddles the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska, NGO "Centre for Promotion of European values – Europlus" Doboj, with the Delegation's support, organised several activities. Rafting "Voyage to Europe" gathered sports canoe/kayak clubs from Zavidovići, Zenica, Banja Luka, Maglaj and Doboj giving special emphasis on symbolic connecting of the towns in the region. Within its Europe Day activities, Europlus Doboj organised a carting competition for BiH carting clubs. In the central park Doboj, an information stand with EU promotional material was placed and Europlus organised drawing competition for children. Their art works were later exhibited.



In **Jajce**, a historic and royal Bosnia and Herzegovina town, Europe Day was marked by a remarkable draping of the largest EU flag on the Jajce medieval fortress by Jajce Alpine club activists. Cultural programme with traditional dances and culinary specialties was organised after the official ceremony. Jajce mayor emphasised that flying of the EU flag, which represents solidarity and harmony of European nations, is a symbol and confirmation of Jajce and BiH to a common future.



On 9 May the parachutes from **Banja Luka** Aero club performed free sky jump carrying EU flag.



Europe Day 2008 activities concluded with a 2-day celebration in **Trebinje** starting from 10 May. The first day was foreseen for sport, singing and dancing competition. A one day judo competition was organised for school children (juniors and younger cadets) and it was followed by street dancers' performances. The second day was foreseen for the kids from kindergartens to express their creativity. Supported by the Delegation, these events were organised by NGO Women's Centre Trebinje and were aimed at linking and building cultural bridges between citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Croatia and Montenegro.

EU Info Centres in Banja Luka, Brcko, Mostar and Tuzla also organised a series of small information activities such as roundtables, lectures and competition in essay writing on "United in Diversity" topic which ended in presentation of awards to the winners of the best essay.

Photos and report are also available on www.europa.ba



Final public debate "Together with Europe" in Sarajevo

The final public debate "Together with Europe" took place in Sarajevo on Thursday, 8 May 2008 and marked the end of the public campaign launched last year and organised in the 21 municipalities/cities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The campaign was organised by the Delegation of the European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina together with the EU institutions, the Directorate for European Integration of BiH and EU Info Centres.

On this occasion, H.E. Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas**, the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. **Osman Topčagić**, the Director of the Directorate for the European Integration of BiH, and Mr. **Predrag Mitrović**, the Deputy Mayor of Sarajevo signed the "Declaration on European future of Bosnia and Herzegovina" as an indication of support for the European integration process in the country. European Union Special Representative/High Representative, **Miroslav Lajcak**, also attended the ceremony and addressed the participants.

Ambassador Kourkoulas stressed that there were no shortcuts in the EU integration process and that progress should be made by all segments of BiH society. Civil society has a central role to play in the EU integration process of the candidate and potential candidate countries and their transformation into modern European democracies, underlined ambassador Kourkoulas and mentioned that the EU had announced the establishment of a new financing facility to promote civil society development and

dialogue. He reminded the participants that the building of European Union has never been an easy process, and said that Bosnia and Herzegovina's path to the European Union will not be an easy process either, but the European Union will make that journey together with you as your partner.

EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak noted that the European path offers one and only strategy for the development and progress in BiH. Therefore, he underlined importance of all citizens being aware of the necessity to jointly participate in that process. Ambassador Lajcak used this opportunity to congratulate every citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina the Europe Day (May 9) and concluded by saying: "The message is clear – Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to Europe."

Mr. Topčagić explained that the objective of the campaign "Together with Europe" was to provide more information about the European integration process and the requirements that Bosnia and Herzegovina must fulfil on its European path to the citizens and the non-governmental sector on the local level. According to him, the outcome of "Together with Europe" campaign is an important way to contribute to the new dynamics in the process of EU integration of BiH.

In his address, the Deputy Mayor Petrović confirmed the commitment and orientation of the City of Sarajevo towards the European Union and underlined that the opportunities for further development were in the faster EU integration process.



About "Together with Europe"

From the 18 October 2007 until the 8 May 2008 public debates and visits to the cities have taken place in: Banjaluka, Bihać, Prijedor, Tuzla, Pale, Goražde, Mostar, Široki Brijeg, Livno, Jajce, Rudo, Foča, Neum, Grude, Brčko District, Bijeljina, Zenica, Doboj, Trebinje and Bileća. Nearly one thousand people participated in the public debates - largest attendance being 120 participants in Jajce.

The public debates have been designed to provide the EU Family and DEI representatives with the possibility to discuss the significance of the EU integration process for Bosnia and Herzegovina. More importantly, the public debates have been an opportunity for the local community representatives, citizens, NGO's and media representatives to get better insight into the requirements, benefits and stakeholders within the EU integration process.

All cities have signed the "Declaration of the European Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina" as a sign of support for the process of European integration.



Dani Klein visited BiH to advocate Roma rights

During her visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms **Dani Klein**, popular singer of the Vaya Con Dios group, an advocate for Roma rights in Europe, met on Thursday, 29 May, 2009 with the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, **Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas**. She was accompanied by Members of the European Parliament Els de Groen and Anna Ibrišagić and representative of Roma Decade Željko Jovanović.

During the meeting Ambassador Kourkoulas informed the guests on the European Commission's involvement in the process of integration of Roma in BiH. He underlined the EC's contribution in strengthening the coordination between Roma associations in the country which improved their position in negotiations with government in solving their fundamental issues. The activities of the EC and the international community have led to development of the National Strategy for Roma and different Action Plans, as well as the establishment of Roma Council. Ms. Klein and MEPs urged for the continuation of support in the forthcoming period in order for the country to adopt the Action Plans and to become a member of the Roma Decade.

At the press conference held after the meeting with Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers Nikola Špirić and BiH Minister for Human Rights and Refugees Safet Halilović, **Ms Klein** explained that her

interest in Roma situation had grown after having seen the grave discrimination against Roma population "This hurts me as a musician and human being, because I believe that every human being deserves to be treated equally. It hurts me as a musician because I know that I would not have made successful carrier if it was not for the Roma music in my songs," pointed out Ms. Klein.

During the day, Ms Klein together with her colleagues, met with the EU Special Representative/High Representative Miroslav Lajčak and discussed the improvement of the Roma situation in BiH.

Roma Decade 2005-2015

The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is an unprecedented political commitment by governments in Central and Southeastern Europe to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma within a regional framework. The Decade focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing, and commits governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming.

Read more on <http://www.romadecade.org>

Donor Coordination Forum Meeting

Head of the European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas** chaired the Donor Coordination Forum in BiH on 28 May, 2008 in Sarajevo. The forum was organised with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in BiH and gathered representatives of the European Commission, international financial organisations (World Bank, EBRD, KfW, UN Agencies), EU Member States financial cooperation agencies and other major bilateral donors (USAID, Canadian International Development Agency, Swiss Development Cooperation, Norway). The main purpose of the meeting was to explain the objectives of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EC and BiH, and discuss the current state of affairs regarding financial assistance of the EC and the donor community to support its implementation.

The key players in the BiH government were invited to present the measures and structures that BiH intends to put in place to implement the SAA and the financial assistance of the EC.

Ambassador Kourkoulas stressed in his opening address how important this moment was for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the meeting was more than timely and appropriate. In the light of the main issue of the meeting, Ambassador Kourkoulas underlined: *Financial assistance needs to be complementary to BiH's own national development strategies and will be managed by BiH once the proper institutions were put in place.*

On behalf of the Directorate for the European Integrations of BiH (DEI), Ms. **Darija Ramljak** expressed *readiness to take over the obligation of*



the SAA. In that regard, she put focus on the area of taxation and customs duties where the first measures needed to be implemented and resolved by 1 July 2008 by BiH authorities.

Mr. **Giulio Zanni**, Political Adviser and Mr. **Emil Okanović** Economic Adviser from the EC Delegation to BiH, provided a detailed overview of the SAA with all its specifics related to the implementation and impact it would have on the Bosnia and Herzegovina. Beside closer political dialogue, enhanced regional cooperation, harmonisation of legislation and cooperation in a variety of sectors, main focus of the SAA discussion was put on establishment of the free-trade area. "Given that BiH is granted transitional periods to adjust slowly to various pressures from the SAA implementation, BiH should act promptly with the needed reforms and should not delay adjustments", concluded Mr. Okanović.

EU Funded Twinning Light Project „Support to the Insurance Agency of BiH“ Officially Commenced



The EU funded Twinning project “Support to the Insurance Agency of BiH” was launched at a press conference in Sarajevo on 31 March 2008. In the following nine months, the 250,000€ Twinning Light Project will be implemented in partnership with the Bulgarian Financial Supervision Commission (FSI).

With an overall objective to stimulate the development of a single insurance market in BiH, this project also aims at ensuring efficient and transparent insurance regulation, monitoring and coordination, arbitration, transparent information sharing and reporting.

In the light of the Twinning project with Bulgarian partners, Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas** reminded participants that since its establishment in 2006, the BiH Insurance Agency contributed to overcome the fragmentation of the market and the current objective was to reinforce and strengthen the Agency. Ambassador Kourkoulas said that up-to date the EU assistance in the insurance sector amounted to 2.75 Million Euro, while

additional 800,000€ was planned under IPA 2007.

Ambassador of Bulgaria to BiH, H.E. Mr **Andrej Transki** expressed his hope that experience of Bulgarian Insurance Supervision Commission would be useful to their BiH colleagues and said: “I am convinced that it will be skillfully implemented in BiH to help move this country closer to the European Union.”

Director of the BiH Insurance Agency, Mr. **Samir Omerhodžić** gave a brief overview of the institutional framework of the insurance sector, and presented current results and future activities of the Agency. He reminded that one of the priorities under the European Partnership document was the creation of a single economic space in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the insurance sector was a vital part of that process. In that regard, Mr. Omerhodžić expressed his satisfaction that the European Commission had recognised notable progress in the insurance sector at the last Reform Process Monitoring (RPM) session. “I express my sincere hope that this and forthcoming projects will contribute largely to the necessary harmonisation of the insurance market in BiH in the context of the possible signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU” concluded Mr. Omerhodžić.

Chairman of FSI Bulgaria, Mr. **Apostol Apostolov**, expressed his hope for a successful cooperation with BiH colleagues and his willingness to provide BiH experts with extensive Bulgarian experience during the project in order to open insurance market of BiH. His deputy, Ms Ralitsa Agayn – Guri announced the participation of the most experienced Bulgarian lawyer in the Twinning project, previously involved in drafting of the entire Bulgarian legislation in insurance sector.

Ambassador Kourkoulas Welcomed the Launch of BHEPA



The newly established Bosnia and Herzegovina Export Promotion Agency (BHEPA), operating within the BiH Foreign Trade Chamber, was launched on 18 March 2008 in Sarajevo in presence of the Head of the European Commission's Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, H.E. Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas**, Mr **Slobodan Puhalac**, BiH Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations and Mr **Milan Lovrić**, President of the BiH Foreign Trade Chamber.

Ambassador Kourkoulas congratulated to the Foreign Trade Chamber of BiH on the establishment of this organisation dedicated to assisting BiH companies to respond to opportunities and challenges present at the global market, underlying its importance for the economic development of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, he noted that the European Union had supported that important institutional development through the EU Expro project, one of many EU funded projects aimed at strengthening the economic position of BiH.

Underlying the importance of establishment of BHEPA, Ambassador Kourkoulas said: «After the signing and implementation of CEFTA and the SAA with the EU, the BiH exports will virtually have the unrestricted access to the world's largest and wealthiest market – the European Union.”

Ambassador Kourkoulas pointed to the fact that BiH exports had increased manifold and that the export/import ratio had increased from 29 to 45% during the past five years. “The trend is positive, but more needs to be done so as to achieve the objective of a balanced trade in goods and services by 2010. Increasing exports is a complex activity that requires a framework in which trade policy, trade promotion and trade practice are synchronised,” said Kourkoulas.

The next important step to be undertaken by BiH state, reminded the Ambassador, was the accession of BiH to WTO.

In his address, Minister Puhalac provided additional information about the decisions of the BiH Council of Ministers that led to establishment of BHEPA focusing on the importance of creation of recognisable BiH products capable to survive on competitive EU market. “Economic development can only be measured by things that are done and one of the important priorities is to reduce foreign trade deficit. It is my sincere hope that the Agency would provide huge contribution in achieving this goal, and that Foreign Trade Chamber would be a place where entrepreneurs will commence and implement numerous positive initiatives”, concluded Minister Puhalac.



About BHEPA

The Bosnia and Herzegovina Export Promotion Agency – BHEPA - is a national agency operating within the Foreign

Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its primary role is to assist all BiH companies to develop and expand export markets by promoting the products and capabilities of the country internationally. European Union provided over 840,000.00 € for the establishment of BHEPA.

For more information about BHEPA, please visit
www.bhexport.ba

France/Estonia – BiH Railway Twinning Project Successfully Completed



The press conference marking the successful completion of the project "Twinning Assistance to the Ministry of Communications and Transport of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Implementation of the Law on Railways", implemented within the EU programme CARDS 2005, was held in Sarajevo on 26 March 2008. French Ministry for Ecology, Sustainable Planning and Development and Estonia as the junior partner implemented the Twinning Project, which had begun on 3 July 2006.

In the course of the Project, Ministry of Communications and Transport of BiH has improved its capacity to deal with EU integration issues and to manage the railway sub-sector, in particular policy-making and its implementation. The specific objectives of this Twinning Project, also successfully accomplished, were to provide targeted assistance to the BiH Ministry of Communications and Transport to implement the Law on Railways of BiH and to identify, adopt, and implement the Acquis provisions related to the railway sub-sector.

On behalf of the European Commission Delegation to BiH, Mr. **Andre Lys**, Head of Operations, explained how vital it was for BH authorities to continue their work in this field, particularly to complete recruitment process within the Railway Regulatory Body. Furthermore, he underlined that it was important to resolve the appointment of infrastructure managers, and to continue further harmonisation with the EU Acquis, as a priority under the European Partnership document. Mr. Lys concluded his address by saying that the European Commission Delegation to BiH would remain committed to this assistance in the railway sector.

The most concrete result of this 21-month long project is that the implementation of its findings and conclusions will allow BiH to be in line with the "First Railway Package" of the EU Directives concerning railway. Mr. Guy Bennatar, Project Leader, said that it was up to BiH to implement the Second Railway Package in particular concerning the issues of railway safety, while the Third Package would be prepared in the course of 2008.

Minister of Communications and Transport of BiH, Mr. **Božo Ljubić** gave an overview of the Project and stressed out that special software for railway registers was obtained and installed in the Railway Regulatory Board. He explained that all relevant subjects were trained and provided with the experts' assistance in the railway sector and expressed his hope that experience obtained through this Project would enable "our experts to easily transfer EU Acquis in the railway sections and undertake necessary reforms as one of the obligations defined with SAA."

The European Commission Delegation to BiH supported the Project with 1 million €.

Institutional and Capacity Building of BiH Education System



Head of the European Commission Delegation to BiH, Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas** and Mr. **Sredoje Nović**, Minister of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina opened the Final Conference of the EU funded project "Institutional and Capacity Building of Bosnia and Herzegovina Education System" (EU-ICBE) in Sarajevo on 11 March 2008. The purpose of the Conference was to present the project results and to introduce the documents produced by the six Project Working Groups to the wider audience in the country.

The European Union financed the EU-ICBE project through CARDS 2005 with 942,365.00€ (March 2006 - March 2008), as a follow-up project to the functional review of education sector. The project was implemented by the University of Jyväskylä (Finland), in cooperation with Gopa Consultants (Germany).

The objective of this Project was to assist the development of institutional capacities in the BiH education sector, through strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of educational management and administration, at all levels of decision-making, for realisation of their respective, constitutionally and legally established responsibilities and functions.

In his opening speech, Ambassador Kourkoulas highlighted that the progress in education reform has been seen in the past year and that this project played important part in this progress. "Now we have a legal framework regulating not only higher education, but also curriculum, standards and assessments", Ambassador said, adding that "this reform indicates that this country has a capacity to move forward if there is a political agreement."

The main achievement of this joint project was a set of documents developing strategies and guidelines in the following topics:

- A strategy for development of education in BiH and implementation plan 2008-2013.

- Coordination of the Education sector in BiH: establishment of the Conference of Ministers of Education, development of coordination model in education system, definition of reporting lines.
- Road Map for EU integration of education system and defining the needs for statistical reporting according to the EUROSTAT requirements.
- Technical support to MoCA for establishment of the Agency for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education - a proposal for possible internal organisation of the Agency drafted and handed over to Ministry of Civil Affairs

These documents are the main instruments for helping BiH strengthen the capacities of the BiH Education System according to internationally recognised standards and best practices.

Conference of Ministers of Education - one of major achievements of the project

The Establishment of the Conference of Ministers of Education and its first session took place following the presentation of the project results. This Conference gathered 13 ministers of education from state, entities and cantonal level and representative of the Department for Education of Brčko District BiH. Apart from Ambassador Dimitris Kourkoulas, Head of the European Commission Delegation to BiH, the Conference was attended by Mr. Miroslav Lajcak, High Representative and European Union Special Representative and Mr. Nikola Špirić, Chairman of BiH Council of Ministers.

At their first session, education ministers adopted Conference's Rules of Procedure and discussed the establishment and functioning of the Council for general education.



European Street Football Festival Foča 2008 – Youth, fun and fair play in the streets of Foča

The team "Nikšić", from Montenegro, is the winner of the first European Street Football Festival, held from 22 May to 25 May, 2008, in Foča, small town in southeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The festival, supported by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Enlargement and organised by non-governmental organisations "Streetfootballworld" from Germany and its partner "Football Friends" from the Republic of Serbia, gathered 240 young players from 15 European countries.

"This unique sports event brought together young people from all over Europe who enjoy playing street football", noted **Olli Rehn**,

EU Commissioner for Enlargement. Mentioning the words of Mr. Rehn during the meeting of organisers and journalists from all over Europe, Mayor of Foča Mr. **Zdravko Krsmanović**, stressed that the main message of this event were characteristics of football – friendship, trust and intercultural cooperation.

Mr Krsmanović presented a symbolic present to Mr. **Ferdinand Kopp** who, on behalf of European Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressed his hope that such an event represents a great opportunity not only for Foča, but for



About European Street Football Festival

The tournament brought together 24 teams, each consisting of eight young, amateur street football players aged 14-18. From Bosnia and Herzegovina, the teams from Foča, Banja Luka, Goražde, Mostar, Sarajevo, Trebinje, Ustikolina and Zenica took part in the tournament.

Twelve teams from the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom and Turkey, respectively, were selected to play in the festival for their contributions to social development through football, with each team representing a social, non-profit organisation

active in this field. The twelve teams from the Western Balkans region brought together in the spirit of friendship and tolerance, communities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Participants attended workshops on fair play in football and learned from other young people committed to social development through football. The football matches were played according to special fair play rules. There were no referees and players themselves were responsible for calling fouls and resolving disputes through dialogue.



the entire region. *"I hope that such an event sends a positive signal from Foča",* added Mr. Kopp.

Former German national football player **Carsten Ramelow** met with the teams and gave young street footballers some insights into the game. *"I have played street football during my childhood, and I believe it is an excellent opportunity for children from different cultures to come closer through playing football. I accepted an invitation to give my contribution to this great event that promotes the social dimension of football in Bosnia and Herzegovina",* said Mr. Ramelow who presented to **Veselko Njeguš**, a young street football player from Foča, his original and signed T-shirt from a German football team of Bayer Leverkusen, for which he played for 12 years.

Watching the games with sincere interest, Mr. **Luka Sodja** from

the European Commission, Enlargement Directorate General, explained that this project was supported because it represents the other, social side of the Directorate-General for Enlargement involvement in BiH. *"We wanted to support the project that shows young people from both Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region that they are not different from the children from other European countries. We wanted to let the children, game and football do the talking."* Mr. Sodja stressed that the football pitch would remain as one of the long lasting results of this project to the children of Foča to continue playing street football after the tournament.

Mayor Krsmanović added that, during these days, Foča was an example of open city and real centre of youth and sport.





European Union Supports Kid's Festival

On 6 June 2008 Ambassador **Dimitris Kourkoulas**, Head of Delegation of European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina was a guest of the opening ceremony of Kid's Festival organised in Sarajevo by NGO Via Kult. With support of the Delegation of European Commission in amount of 100.000 Euro, 40,000 children from entire Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoyed in various five-day programmes of the Festival.

"EU is running many projects in this country, a lot of them are very important, but I believe this is the most important project we have had in the last year", highlighted Ambassador Kourkoulas and additionally explained: "This project is very important not because of financial means which we contributed in it, but because of youth and children of this country." Ambassador commended Ms. **Susanne Prah-Ladžo**, Manager of ViaKult Office for her initiative of organising this event for years and addressed the children who visited the Festival: "You have to be proud of your country, because it

has beautiful rivers, mountains, nature and because this is the country of very prominent artists, writers, country with very rich history", said Ambassador Kourkoulas and added: "Therefore, we are very keen to have this country as a part of our family." Ambassador concluded his address by expressing his hope that the next year this Festival would gather children from the whole region.

Ms. Susanne Prah-Ladžo expressed her gratitude to Ambassador Kourkoulas and his team for the support provided by EC Delegation to BiH, pointing out that this support would ensure that all children who expressed their interest to visit the Festival would have an opportunity to do so. "With your support we made happy hearts of thousands and thousands of children and I hope this is going to be a long friendship between us." said Ms. Prah-Ladžo.

At the end of presentation ViaKult praised Ambassador Kourkoulas with the EU flag made of balloons and with a show of clown who came from Italy to entertain BiH children.



About Kid's Festival



Kid's Festival is the largest manifestation for children & youth in BiH which has been organised for five years now by NGO ViaKult. This truly children's festival provided five days of countless programme items, interactively joining education and entertainment for at least 40,000 children from the whole BiH. During the Festival children have had a chance to share and develop a respect and understanding for other cultures through entertainment, dance and game. Entertainers from Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and

many other countries around the world performed to BiH children.

For many children this was the first discovery of Sarajevo as the capital of their country. Also, special efforts are undertaken to include children with special needs to this manifestation.

Festival took place from 6 to 10 June 2008 in Zetra Hall in Sarajevo.

For more information please visit: www.kidsfest.ba