



Joint statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the occasion of Bosnia and Herzegovina submitting membership application

Brussels, 15 February 2016

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And we need unity in challenging times. As some forces across our continent are questioning the very existence of our Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina's application shows that the need of a united European continent is still strong among our peoples.

The decision to apply belongs to the citizens and government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to them only. But as the European Union – together with our international partners and the international financial institutions – we have strongly invested in strengthening Bosnia and Herzegovina's European perspective. The two of us visited Sarajevo together just one month after the beginning of our mandate in 2014. In a moment when the perspective of an EU path for Bosnia and Herzegovina looked bleak, we decided to renew our Union's approach to the country.

The new approach was based on the decision to put concrete issues first – that is, citizens first. A pragmatic choice and a symbolic one: the *raison d'être* of our Union is to impact on our citizens' life for the better.

The achievements of this past year on a broad reform agenda are impressive. In fact, we would not be here today if it were not for the country's leadership. The country's political system has delivered on its citizens' needs – as long as all leaders and all government levels cooperate towards a common goal.

We must now seize the momentum gained so far, and keep on working hard. The reforms improving economic growth and social justice, the rule of law and the public administration need to be implemented. The functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions remains a priority, including through the effective and functioning coordination mechanism on EU matters. The adaptation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement following the accession of Croatia will allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to normalise its trade relations with the Union. The country will continue enjoying the benefits of the advantageous trade and investment regime, while protecting its domestic producers in accordance with the Agreement. Finally, we expect that the authorities at all levels will ensure that the challenges the country faces when it comes to its judicial system are addressed constructively, in a spirit of dialogue and mutual understanding.

Still there are wounds that need to be healed. But together we can help each other to move towards a future of reconciliation. Together, we can build a stronger European continent where all communities live side by side and cooperate beyond ethnic, national and religious divides. Twenty years after the war, it is about time we all looked ahead, towards our common future in a truly united Europe.

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