



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

STATEMENT

by

His Excellency Dr. Haris Silajdzic
Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Head of Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
at the
General Debate of the 65th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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PERMANENT MISSION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to address the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Allow me to express my gratitude to Dr. Ali Adussalam Treki for having ably presided over this body during the past year, and to congratulate Mr. Joseph Deiss on being elected the new President of the General Assembly.

Fifteen years ago, the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the aggression and brought peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina. My country has gone a long way since, and I feel obliged to thank the governments, organizations, and individuals who assisted us in travelling this road.

When we asked you to support us to become a non-permanent member of the Security Council, you honored us with almost unanimous support. That demonstrated that you hold Bosnia and Herzegovina in esteem, and we are proud of that. As a member of the Security Council, we are doing our best to meet your expectations and honor the trust you gave us.

Thanks to the generous assistance of many of your governments, Bosnia and Herzegovina mainly completed the reconstruction process relatively quickly given the level of devastation. But the rebuilding of our devastated society proved to be much more difficult. From 1992 to 1995, an old, genuinely multicultural society of Bosnia and Herzegovina was brutally and intentionally torn apart by force. One-half of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina had to leave their homes in order to save their lives. One million three hundred thousand of them still remain outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Systematic obstructions were the cause of failure of return programs, and they are still an obstacle to those who want to return. Those who made it back to their homes are often confronted with a wall of blockades or with outright violations of basic rights. That makes the restoration of our pluralist society the single most difficult task ahead of us. But hope remains that the upcoming constitutional changes will lay a foundation for the new generation to bridge the divides. No matter what, we will continue to revive the pluralist character and tolerant spirit of our society because we strongly believe that cultural pluralism is the mankind's most precious treasure.

Good economy can be a powerful tool to achieve this goal. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country rich in water and other energy-generating resources. We have made studies and have invited international investors to participate in developing these resources. Once completed, these projects will be the driving engine of our economy, enabling us to make progress in other areas, such as health care and social services. We continue to develop our infrastructure and agricultural resources, but not at a desirable pace. Although generally improved, our education system remains in some aspects hostage to divisive political influences.

On the other side, our rising trade activities have resulted in improving our relations with the countries in the region, and great opportunities can be unlocked through more intensive and more confident regional cooperation. Like in other societies, our greatest resource is our youth, educated in our country and abroad, ready to take over once our economy is able to absorb their skills and talents. I am confident that in the coming years a number of job opportunities will arise parallel with the development of the vast resources that lie still unused in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Defense reform is commonly seen as one of the greatest post-Dayton successes because it resulted in the unified, modern armed forces. Here again we have to express our appreciation to our friends and allies whose assistance made this possible. In short time our armed forces managed to earn the trust and respect of the United Nations through their participation in peacekeeping mission.

Like everywhere else, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina desire peace, stability and prosperity – a better future for themselves and their children. There is great potential for development, and opportunities are there to seize them. So, yes, there are reasons for optimism. But there are reasons for concern too.

Our progress is hindered by the remnants of those who still believe in the completion of the political project that proved catastrophic not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but for the whole region. In short, they think that the world has forgotten the atrocities committed against the civilian population, the concentration camps, the rape camps and the genocide. After hundreds of thousands of non-Serb civilians were killed and expelled from one part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are now publically calling for the secession of that part. They hope and “dream,” as they say, that the world would somehow recognize that entity as an independent state. Instead of feeling shame, these disciples of Milošević, Karadžić and Ratko Mladić are now ready to come and ask you to reward the genocide in Srebrenica, Prijedor, Zvornik, Sarajevo, Mostar and other sites of horrific crimes for which Karadžić is now being tried at the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague. What a monument to inhumanity would that be!

Of course, they will not succeed. They can no longer count on the mighty armies of Slobodan Milošević because those armies were defeated through our heroic struggle. They do count on, as they say, favourable geopolitical circumstances. But they fail to take one thing into account, as did Milošević: Bosnia and Herzegovina will be defended!

They will, however, continue obstructing progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they will continue destabilizing the region. They found inspiration in the inadequate response of the international community, whose patience they have been testing for the last fifteen years. So, our collective resolve to prevent the escalation and opening of fresh wounds in Bosnia and Herzegovina is being tested again. We must not fail this time!

This dangerous adventurism aside, I believe and I know that the train of progress cannot and will not be stopped. There is no doubt in my mind that Bosnia and Herzegovina and our entire region will maintain stability and achieve prosperity in the coming years, thus fulfilling the dreams and desires of every one of our citizens.