

**United States Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina
Charles L. English**

Speech to the University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Political Science

April 19, 2008

Thank you very much, Dean Pejanovic, and Professor Keco-Isakovic. It is truly a great pleasure to be here today.

I would also like to thank the Faculty of Political Sciences and the University for inviting me to address your students.

Dean Pejanovic, University officials, members of the academic community, professors, students:

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a true and steadfast partner in the United States. Over the past thirteen years and three administrations, despite pressing foreign policy challenges around the globe, the United States has maintained an active presence and an abiding interest in this country. No other country or institution has been more active and engaged in helping guide this country towards a prosperous and democratic future. The commitment of the United States to Bosnia and Herzegovina will not waver.

The United States believes in the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have unshakeable confidence that you want a multiethnic, democratic Bosnia inside Euro-Atlantic structures. That is the goal that guides my government, and it is reachable if the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina take the steps necessary to realize it. Beginning with the leading role the United States played at Dayton, we have stood side by side with the citizens of Bosnia. We will be standing with you when you are welcomed into the community of Euro-Atlantic nations. I am pleased that I am able to stand before you today and say that Bosnia has made important progress in recent weeks.

Several years ago, with our strong support, Bosnia established a single Ministry of Defense and a multi-ethnic armed forces. They are now serving Bosnia's national security needs and leading its integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures. I was very pleased, and the citizens of this country should be very proud, that at the Bucharest Summit, Bosnia was invited to begin an Intensified Dialogue with NATO. This is an important milestone in Bosnia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and a vote of confidence that this country has the potential to become an important and fully integrated member of the alliance. The United States worked closely with political leaders to ensure that the reforms necessary for Bosnia to take another step towards NATO membership were met. This is further evidence of our commitment to helping Bosnia progress towards eventual NATO membership and modern statehood.

Bosnian parliamentarians also recently adopted two laws that will create new state-level police structures consistent with the Mostar Declaration and the Sarajevo Action Plan.

We understand that many were dissatisfied by the police reform process and that not all political parties are happy with the outcome. Every reform will not be perfect. What is most important is that the reforms move Bosnia forward. And, the most important thing about the two police reform laws is that their adoption has opened the door for Bosnia to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. This is a crucial step along Bosnia's road towards EU membership.

However, speaking honestly, reaching agreement on police reform and adopting police reform legislation took far too long. Sustained and, at times, forceful intervention by the international community was required to convince Bosnian leaders to reach consensus. It should not have been necessary. The SAA is a critical milestone in Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic integration process. Political party leaders and elected officials should have been mindful of their responsibilities to reach consensus for the good of the country. Passage of this legislation took three years. Bosnia cannot afford to wait as its leaders continue to bicker over legislation needed to move the country forward.

Bosnia is only at the beginning of its road towards NATO and EU membership. Much more comprehensive reforms will be required, particularly as part of the EU accession process. Your political leadership faces the task of harmonizing its legislation with the EU *aquis communautaire*. This document contains 350,000 pages of rules and regulations and is increasing by 5,000 pages each year. In the first phase of SAA implementation alone, Bosnia must enact 1,159 regulations mandated by the *aquis*. It is sobering to note that last year the Council of Ministers approved only 38 of 118 pieces of legislation it considered. The state parliament ratified only 40 of 135 laws on its agenda. If Bosnia and Herzegovina is to have a realistic hope of joining the EU, its political leadership must work much, much harder. They cannot spend three years exchanging bitter polemics over each reform, as they did with police reform. To join the Euro-Atlantic community and for the good of its citizens, Bosnia and Herzegovina must make the transition to a functional, reform-oriented, modern and democratic European country.

The most important benefits for the average citizen of Bosnia of the European Union will be economic. Access to the common market, the opportunity to find jobs anywhere in Europe and increased foreign investment are just some of the positive things that will happen. The time to start on improving Bosnia's economic situation, however, is now. Bosnia's economy has been growing at a solid rate (more than 6% last year). Nonetheless, all is not well. Unemployment – especially among young people – is too high. The business climate is still not as it should be. The World Bank ranks Bosnia 95th in the world as a place to do business and, unfortunately, one of the worst places in the world to start a business. There is no reason to wait to implement economic reforms that will encourage new businesses, help existing businesses to expand and attract more foreign investment. There are many examples in Europe such as Ireland and Slovenia, where the right economic policies have rapidly led to a remarkable level of prosperity. There is absolutely no reason why it cannot be done here. Bosnia has great economic potential. This is a basic responsibility of this country's political leadership and should be the highest priority.

I, and my predecessors, have stood before you many times to say that the United States cannot help Bosnia without active and engaged partners. Too often over the last two years, Bosnia's political leaders have engaged in a destabilizing dialogue among themselves. They have focused their time and energy on the issues that divide the country, rather than on those that bring it together and those that could move it forward. Rather than choose to heal wounds, they have sought to exploit them politically. The invitation to join NATO's Intensified Dialogue and the signing of an SAA present your political leadership with an opportunity to move beyond the dreadful, divisive, and destructive politics of the last two years. We are prepared to work with them if they seize it.

It may seem churlish of me to raise this point now, with the SAA now ready to be signed and Intensified Dialogue just having been achieved. But, in my view, it is precisely now that the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina must make their choice: to seize this opportunity and advance toward Europe and NATO, or to fall far behind your neighbors. We are here at a crossroads, and the paths are clearly defined. The path to Europe will be the politically more difficult path, to be sure, but it is the only path to the future. If Bosnia's leaders choose their more footworn, familiar, traditional path, that is to say if they continue to use the reform process as a battleground for narrow ethnic agendas, no one, not the United States or the EU, nor any other international institution will be able to prevent them from betraying the hopes of Bosnia's citizens. Not a single Bosnian citizen, of any ethnicity or entity, benefited from the recent, wasteful cycle of artificial crises engineered by political leaders or the prolonged stalemate over police reform. Much time has been unnecessarily lost. Bosnia desperately needs statesmanship. The behavior of the last two years was completely inconsistent with that imperative.

I would like to address specific comments to the political leaders of the constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have said this before, but this is a message of central importance that I believe bears restating.

For Serbs, you must accept that your future lies within Bosnia and Herzegovina. The separation of any part of this country is not only impractical, but unacceptable and dangerous. Rhetoric that even hints at such an option is destabilizing. Secession, under any circumstances, is not an option. We must be clear about one thing: there is no independent path for Republika Srpska, separate from Bosnia and Herzegovina, to accede into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Recent years have witnessed unprecedented growth and development in Republika Srpska. This development has convinced some that prosperity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is zero-sum -- that the success and strength of one part of the country must come at the expense of the state. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sustained prosperity and development can and must only be universal. Make no mistake, a prosperous and successful Republika Srpska can only exist as part of a strong and prosperous state.

We know that at times the state is not always effective. But instead of issuing challenges to state institutions that further undermine and weaken them, Serb leaders should proactively seek means to mend and reform these institutions to the benefit of all the citizens of this country. That is the only way to guarantee this country's Euro-Atlantic future and its future prosperity. Serb leaders must understand that cannot advance Republika Srpska's interests by weakening the state. Serb leaders must also accept that more state-level reforms will be necessary to implement the SAA and secure the benefits for their constituents of membership in the Euro-Atlantic community.

For Bosniaks, you cannot allow the past to drive your political agenda or straightjacket your approach to reform. The legacy of the war years still hangs heavily over Bosnia, and it will continue to hang over your country for many years. This is unavoidable, and it is a tragedy. My government believes strongly that those who committed terrible crimes must be brought to justice. Moving forward does not mean forgetting; it does not diminish the legitimacy of past suffering or the importance of memory. It is reasonable to ask others to openly confront the past, but for Bosnia to move forward, you must also do your part to build trust. The politics of vengeance will not lead you to NATO or the European Union.

To build trust, you must work to build consensus and be prepared to make concessions. Political leaders who promise it all, who promise the past can be rewritten, offer hollow promises. An all or nothing approach to negotiation inevitably leads to nothing, or worse. A policy based on majority rule leads to further mistrust and cannot lead to the stable democracy Bosniak leaders claim they want. Bosnia needs checks and balances to protect the interests of all constituent peoples and minorities. Bosniak political leaders also have a responsibility to make state-level institutions work, since their effectiveness is critical to the country's Euro-Atlantic integration. It is irresponsible to politicize state-level institutions or to put narrow ethnic interests ahead of broader state interests when managing them.

For Croats, you must accept that further ethnic division of this already divided country can never happen. Your diagnosis of many of the problems confronting Bosnia has merit. My government shares your view that the Bosnian state must be strengthened, that without a basic level of autonomy and credibility the state cannot drive the Euro-Atlantic integration process, as it must. That is why my government has supported and continues to support constitutional reform. Unfortunately, competing proposals that focus on Bosnia's internal boundaries and territorial organization have fueled ethnic divisions. They have distracted from the discussion that must take place about providing the state with structures functional and efficient enough to meet Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic obligations.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, the United States believes in Bosnia and the people of Bosnia. We believe that this country's citizens deserve the peaceful, prosperous future inside Euro-Atlantic structures that they are asking their political leaders to secure for them. Bosnia has taken a step closer to its destiny within Euro-Atlantic structures, but the responsibilities of Bosnia's leaders have now become

correspondingly greater. Decades in the future, historians will look back at how Bosnia was transformed from a post-conflict society divided by ethnic fault lines into a vibrant, prosperous multiethnic European state. In doing so they will identify a turning point at which Bosnia's political leaders recognized their shared destiny and seized a moment that made this outcome possible. I appeal to all, elected officials, political leaders, and citizens to let that moment be now.