

Speech by H.E. Dr. Haris Silajdzic

Your Excellencies, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen:

I have the exceptional honor and pleasure to greet you at this ceremony on behalf of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to wish the successful construction of the new building of the Embassy of the United States of America in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With its continued presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the most difficult days in our history, the United States has demonstrated exceptional support for our country, its progress, and the preservation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The construction of this building symbolizes the continued interest of the United States for the development and strengthening of bilateral relations between our two countries.

The close relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the United States of America have existed since the independence of our country. The United States was among the first to recognize the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina on April 7, 1992.

Diplomatic relations were established on August 6, 1992, and the Embassy of the United States began operations on November 10, 1993, as part of the American Embassy Vienna. The first Embassy of the United States of America in Sarajevo was opened on July 4, 1994, at the celebration of the 218th anniversary of the independence of the United States, in the midst of the most difficult of times.

Madeleine Albright, the then US Ambassador to the United Nations and a friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina, attended the ceremony. Apart from expressing support for the citizens of besieged Sarajevo during that visit with the words "I am a Sarajevan," Ambassador Albright anticipated the future relations between our two countries by stating: "Your future and America's future are inseparable."

Her words weigh even more 14 years later, because the United States of America, with the same intensity, continues to support the development of democratic values, human rights and the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The experience of our two countries is also closely related. The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the citizens of the United States, appreciate and believe in the advantages of a multiethnic society, and are guided by the idea of coexistence, mutual respect and tolerance. For hundreds of years Bosnia and Herzegovina has existed on these ideas and values, and the experience from our recent past only stresses the significance

of advocating for and defending these values. To that end, the assistance of the United States, a country that naturally understands the advantages of these values, is of crucial importance for the further development of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a functional, multiethnic democracy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is trying to repay the assistance which the United States has given to our country, and is becoming an increasingly important partner to the United States in various fields. The soldiers from our two countries are helping peacekeeping efforts in several missions worldwide, and the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards membership in NATO represents a symbolic commitment of our country and its citizens for even closer cooperation with the United States in joint efforts for peace, stability, democracy, and prosperity in the Balkans and in Europe, in general.

Mutual relations between our two countries are getting better every year. Political and strategic cooperation has always existed at a very high level; economic and cultural cooperation is increasing; therefore, I hope that business relations will intensify even more, particularly through investments of American corporations in projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On behalf of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I would like to use this opportunity to thank the United States for its unselfish support and determination to continue its active engagement in our country. Apart from expressing gratitude to the current Ambassador, H.E. English, we also owe gratitude to the previous six US Ambassadors who served in our country, the first of whom experienced and lived through the daily shelling and other dangers together with the citizens of Sarajevo. We owe special gratitude to the United States for having stopped the further destruction and loss of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that is something we will never forget.

And may I express our deepest gratitude to Robert Frasure, Joseph Kruzel and Nelson Drew who gave their lives in an effort to bring us peace. To their families I say: "We will always remember your loss and their sacrifice."

Finally, Your Excellency, allow me to express my satisfaction at this groundbreaking ceremony, and my hope for the successful construction of the new building of the Embassy of the United States of America in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today's ceremony and the new building symbolize the friendship between our two countries in the best possible way, as well as the continuation of good bilateral relations and strong cooperation in a number of areas.