

Bosnia & Herzegovina: continuing standstill

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) made very limited progress towards EU membership in 2013. The lack of measures to address discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, and thus implement the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights is preventing BiH from moving closer to the EU.

Background

BiH was recognised as a [potential candidate](#) country for EU accession in 2003. A [Stabilisation and Association Agreement \(SAA\)](#) was signed in 2008, paving the way to EU membership. [Visa facilitation and readmission agreements](#) entered into force on 1 January 2008. The same year, a [European partnership](#) was adopted by the Council and an [Interim Agreement \(IA\)](#) on trade was signed. Political impasse stalled the reforms needed for EU accession: after the [2010 general election](#), ethnic political leaders took over a year to reach agreement on the formation of a new government. The launch of the [high-level dialogue](#) on the accession process with BiH in 2012 was considered as a positive step to move forward in the EU accession process but the results achieved so far remain below expectations.

European Commission 2013 progress report

The [report](#) underlines that BiH is at a standstill in the European integration process. As far as the political criteria are concerned, the Commission regrets that the SAA has not yet entered into force because the country has not met one of the key EU requirements, implementation of the [European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECtHR) judgment in the [Sejdić/Finci case](#) regarding discrimination against citizens on the grounds of ethnicity, which is crucial for the country to advance towards EU membership. The Commission notes that no improvement has been achieved on establishing a coordination mechanism on EU-related matters between the different levels of government, the legislative processes is still slow, corruption and organised crime remain prevalent, discrimination against the Roma minority, the lesbian and gay population is widespread and political and financial pressure on independent media has increased. As regards the economic criteria, unemployment is very high, no progress has been made towards a functioning market economy; the Commission considers also that the weak legal system is a clear deterrent to investment, and a source of corruption. Finally, the lack of genuine political support for the EU agenda is reflected in very limited progress as regards the EU *acquis*, the Commission indicates.

BiH's reaction

During [a meeting](#) with EU officials, BiH's Prime Minister, Vjekoslav Bevanda expressed optimism that, with additional efforts, BiH will manage to achieve concrete progress on its road to the EU. Bevanda believes that the launch of [Serbia's EU accession talks](#) can have a positive impact on his country. In a [Shadow Progress Report](#) (2013) produced by a broad platform of civil society organisations, concerns are expressed about the lack of compromise in BiH, the complexity of the political system and the Constitution created, they say, to satisfy ethnicity criteria and not civil rights. Bosnian civil society wants the EU to involve it more involved in the process of European integration.

EU position

The [Council](#) has repeatedly regretted the on-going failure of BiH's political leaders to implement the ECtHR ruling in the Sejdić/Finci case, preventing the country from making further progress towards the EU. [EU Commissioner for Enlargement](#) Štefan Füle believes that there are no excuses for Bosnia and Herzegovina lagging behind others in the region. The European Parliament will vote on a [motion for resolution](#), drafted by Doris Pack (EPP, Germany) on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee, calling on the Commission to do more to facilitate efforts to find a solution on the Sejdić/Finci ruling, and on EU leaders to show more commitment to BiH.

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