

Speech NEAR Director Calavera Ruiz-Calavera, Sarajevo, 21 March 2019

Scene setter:

14:15 - 15:00 Event to launch the EUSR-funded project "**My place in Europe: building and promoting EU integration dialogue**"

Where: Gazi-Husrev-beg Library Main Conference Hall (Director Calavera and Grand Mufti will enter through main entrance)

Order of Speakers: Event moderator will briefly introduce the project and give the floor to Grand Mufti Mr. Kavazovic who will speak for up to 10 minutes. The moderator will then introduce you and you will have up to 20 minutes to reflect on the project, its importance and talk about EU values.

Audience: First two rows will be reserved for high-ranking officials from the Islamic Community as well as those attending the event from EUD/EUSR side. Most of the audience will be madrasa students participating in the project.

Background:

On the project: This is a 100.000 EUR CFSP/EUSR's budget outreach project to students from Islamic religious high schools (madrasas) over a 6 months' period (March-August 2019). It is implemented by the Islamic Community in BiH. It follows a previous yet different project on youth and community engagement (training of religious leaders, parents and youth to recognise early signs of radicalisation)

Aim of the project : raise awareness of EU and promote sense of belonging and civic activism among young people. The project will increase students' knowledge about the EU and fight the prejudice that European values are irreconcilable with Islam by discussing the heritage of different faiths and cultures in Europe. The implementation of the project is entrusted to the Islamic Community BiH with ongoing EUD/EUSR consultation.

Project activities: student survey and curriculum development; 40 lectures and 40 workshops for ca 1200 high school students in 6 madrasas across BiH; competition to select 10-12 student works in literature and art; central debate between madrasas about the EU integration; Study tour for 10 selected students to Brussels; 6 EU clubs in madrasas will continue with their activities on EU integration after the project; print and online communication.

The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IC BIH) is the official organisation of the Islamic faith in the country and the most influent Islamic organisation in the whole Western Balkans. Differently from Islam elsewhere, the IC BIH is organised as a no-profit, non-governmental organisation since 1882. It manages all aspects of the cult, including education in six madrasas (Islamic theological high-schools), whose students often later achieve positions in social influence, both within the religious field (madrasa education is a precondition for working as Muslim clerics) and beyond. The Grand Mufti (*Rais-ul-ulama*) is the highest religious authority, elected for a maximum of two terms of 7 years by an assembly of the Islamic community. Mr. Kavazovic was elected in 2012.

Speakings:

- Good to continue cooperation between Islamic Community BiH and EU
- Glad to see many students, boys and girls, from the BiH religious high schools
- Very telling the project name is “**my place in Europe**”. The place of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its future are in Europe.

[EU path of BiH]

- Your country applied for EU membership in 2016 and the COM is examining in detail your institutional and legislative set up to which reforms BiH needs to undertake to become a MS.
- Requirements for being a MS are the same for all: stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.
- Whole EU committed to the future accession of BiH, cf. 2018 Western Balkans Strategy: “*With sustained effort and engagement, BiH could become a candidate for accession.*”
- Your future is in the EU, as a community of values for all citizens - not just a big market for big companies. This perspective is real. Croatia joined in 2013, other countries in the Balkans will join in the coming years if they do their homework.
- EU accession changes lives for the better. But it requires your engagement here and now to help your country reform and overcome divisions. EU integration takes place here, within the country – not in Brussels.
- Many young people decide to leave the country and live abroad. But this is not how you will change your country. It’s by pursuing EU path that you will ensure that your living conditions are improved today, not in the distant future.

[EU accession, EU values and fundamental rights]

- EU accession is more than standards, it’s about values. Only those countries who are committed to uphold and promote **EU values** may join.
- What are these values? Prominent in Art.2 of EU Treaty: “*Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.*”

- All European citizen should be able to identify with these values – they are common to people of different religions and political views. Believing that these values are the foundation of our societies is what makes us all Europeans.
- One right in particular: **freedom of religion and belief**. This is first of all freedom of conscience and freedom of thought. It is the basis for a free and pluralist society. EU is committed to its promotion. [*Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, Jan Figel, visited Sarajevo last year*]
- There's a concerning trend of exclusion, xenophobia, racism and discrimination worldwide, including Europe. We need to move beyond tolerance, towards a broader notion of **acceptance and inclusion of diversity**.
- Art. 17 EU Treaty: "*The Union respects ... the status ... of churches and religious communities... [as well as] of philosophical and non-confessional organisations. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an **open, transparent and regular dialogue** with these churches and organisations.*"
- This is why I am glad that we are able to speak to each other and pursue common interests together towards a European Bosnia and Herzegovina
- What's needed is a **rich and fair secularism**, opening spaces for both believers and non-believers. Fair cooperation between public authorities and faith communities: both are free within their own sphere of action.
- Choices of conscience are personal and cannot be replaced by any official ideology. And religious communities cannot get involved in daily politics. But they need to remain constructively engaged in society.
- Religious leaders can help promote a culture of dialogue, away from politics of identity. They can help improving public institutions as the only framework for the exercise of the rights of all citizens.
The Islamic Community, as all other faith organisations in BiH, has a role to play in the EU integration process. You bring **a form of Islam with European tradition**, rooted in a history of coexistence. You have lessons to share with us and our Member States on how to be European Muslims.
- EU is a project of **reconciliation** and unity, respecting differences. Unity in diversity. The opposite of nationalism, which is hate of others. Being European is fighting intolerance and defending free, just and democratic societies.

- BiH needs to become a state for all its citizens, without ethnic or religious discrimination. A modern, liberal and civic state, governed in the European way on the basis of Bosnian traditions.
- To get there, **education** has a great role to help overcome prejudices. Education is about learning to listen to each other.
- Advancing on the European path for BiH will mean talking to each other, and then getting down to work as a team.
- This is a very old institution. It was in a madrasa like this that Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak studied, over hundred years ago, before becoming mayor and bringing electric light to the streets of Sarajevo. And it was in a similar period, when many were leaving BiH for lack of hope, that Džemaludin Čaušević decided to return instead and work for educational reforms in the country. You have many role models in your history which can inspire you.
- In the course of this project, you will listen to lecturers talking about the history and the functioning of the EU, its founding values, institutions and current challenges, and the heritage of various faiths and cultures in Europe.
- You will then reflect upon these topics through the universal language of **art**. We want to listen to you. What is your place in Europe? What is your opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina and its EU path ahead?
- I hope I will be able to meet you again in six months and **learn it from you**.