

**United States Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina Patrick Moon  
Welcoming Note: The Western Balkans Program, Progress, Stagnation or  
Regression?  
June 12, 2011, University of Sarajevo**

Good evening Ministers, Ambassadors, Mike Haltzel, Dan Hamilton, Sasha Toperich, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you at the opening of this important conference. I am pleased that you have gathered so many esteemed thinkers on the Balkans together with leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region to discuss the most pressing regional issues.

The title of your program is: “Progress, Stagnation, or Regression?” I respectfully submit that at this time in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina your conference should focus primarily on one of these, Progress. After some years of stagnation, progress is the only option – regression must not be an option.

The United States takes pride in our commitment, hard work and assistance aimed at building a peaceful, multi-ethnic, democratic, and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the past decade, we have been repeating the same talking point: We see Bosnia and Herzegovina’s future as a state fully integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic structures – it is the only option if this country is to make “progress.”

This view enjoys the support of the vast majority of Bosnia and Herzegovina's people and leaders. However, just stating this goal over and over is not enough. I call on everyone who shares this view, especially the elected leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to challenge themselves to articulate a vision of progress and a clear road map for implementation of that vision, a vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina's future that is prosperous and stable, a vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina that is on the road to membership in the European Union and NATO, a vision of a Bosnia and Herzegovina in which all citizens are welcome and all citizens can prosper.

I am pleased to see so many representatives here from academia, civil society, journalism, in addition to government officials. Many of you naturally spend much of your time and energy diagnosing problems. You analyze the past; you analyze policy; you analyze what has worked and what has not. While this type of analysis is understandable, useful and desirable; and it reasonable to ask each other to openly confront the past. But I suggest that in this conference you will need to move past diagnosis. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is too much talk of diagnosis; there is not enough talk of remedies. Everybody knows what the problems were, and are; let's focus now on how to fix them.

As I said on the eve of Bosnia and Herzegovina's elections eight months ago, winning elections is not the hard part. It was the day after the elections that politicians faced the choice of making the prosperity of this

country and its citizens the driving force behind their actions. It was the day after elections that the citizens of Bosnia deserved that their leaders replace stagnation and confrontation with joint action. It was on that day that the serious work should have begun.

Drawing on my experience here over the last nine months, I would say that there are important things about which everyone agrees. Of course, in my time here I have become aware of disagreements, but these disagreements are often in the details, not on the core goals. I believe that the points of agreement are more important than the details of disagreement. So allow me to open your conference by making some observations about some things that I am confident the vast majority of Bosnia and Herzegovina's people and leaders agree on.

First, I believe that everyone agrees that they want to live in a Bosnia and Herzegovina in which its citizens have the opportunity to succeed, to pursue their personal goals and ambitions, to provide for their families and allow their children to have a more prosperous, more stable, and more peaceful life than they have had.

I believe that everyone agrees that citizens expect their government to make possible their aspirations for a more prosperous future. As throughout the world, everyone expects that the government should serve its citizens and work toward their common good. In light of this, I believe that everyone

agrees that the most important task now before the leaders who won elections last October is the formation of a state level government that can begin work and focus on the reform agenda.

Therefore, the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina should understand that the basic task of getting the government up and working is more important to the citizens of BiH than disputes about which party has a certain ministerial position.

The political leaders should focus on what brings people together rather than on those issues which divide them. I believe that everyone agrees that this goal is nobler, more important, and more statesmanlike than efforts of politicians to score points against each other or to “save face” by refusing to compromise, at the expense of all of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s citizens.

I believe that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina want to live in a country protected by the rule of law, where judicial institutions serve the common interests of all citizens, where no one is greater than the law and where all citizens enjoy equal protection.

I believe that by strengthening democracy and democratic institutions, protecting human rights, and successfully addressing the reform agenda, Bosnia and Herzegovina will be able to make progress toward European

integration, and this will bring the added stability and prosperity the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina desire.

Twenty-one states have joined European structures (which have become the European Union) since their foundation with just six members in 1952. Although every state has had to adapt its laws – even its constitution – none of them has had to compromise on the basic structure of its democratic state or government. All preserved or enhanced protections for their minority populations. Moving down the road to EU membership is hard work, but the road does not favor one or another political party or group; it favors only the citizens as a whole.

The mayor of New York City in the 1930s and 40s, Fiorello LaGuardia – who served by the way in a U.S. Consulate in the Balkans – famously said “There is no Republican or Democratic way to pick up trash.” Similarly, there should be no Serb, Croat, or Bosniak way to implement the bulk of the reforms required for progressing towards Europe. The vast majority of reforms needed for progress affect no discernible ethnic interest for the three constituent peoples or any of the many other minorities who live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no Serb, Croat, or Bosniak way (to pick an example from last year) to regulate the transport of hazardous materials, to hold a census, to deal with property issues, or to accept generous offers of foreign assistance.

I believe that the voters of this country, the people who elected the leaders, want these problems solved so that Bosnia and Herzegovina can make progress. But I also believe that the vast majority of citizens are not that concerned with the details on which politicians do not seem able to agree. I do not believe that a large number of citizens wake up in the morning worrying about what to do with prospective or non-prospective state property, about what questions they may be asked or not asked on a census, or about the bureaucratic mechanisms for negotiating international assistance.

Finally, let me conclude by saying that I have faith in the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In my travels throughout this beautiful country I am always inspired when I speak with youth, NGO leaders, academics, and entrepreneurs who are dedicated to strengthening civil society, promoting respect for human rights, helping their fellow citizens, improving their communities, and working actively to move Bosnia and Herzegovina forward on the path to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. When the politics are discouraging, I think of these people and the tangible, positive changes they are bringing.

While we talk about political leaders, we should not forget about citizen leaders. These are the people, young and old, who on their own take the initiative, establish businesses, employ Bosnians on the basis of qualifications rather than ethnicity, build bridges to other communities, reject

nationalist rhetoric, and do what is right for this country. They are the hope for the future.

Let me also stress that the United States is here, and we are here to stay. While sometimes we are expected to do everything, there are many things we cannot and should not do. We also not perfect. While the Dayton Agreement brought about peace, we acknowledge that it is imperfect and that peace came too late for far too many. We Americans have spent our blood and treasure here; we have been a true friend of this country and have tried to help in every way we can. Without a doubt, we are invested in the future of this country. We are also optimistic because we have faith in the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the young people.

But it is time for Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders to do their part; form a coalition and get to work. Take this country forward toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The path is clear. The people want it, and their future requires it. But they need good political leadership to take them there.

I know that at the end of the day, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina will hold their leaders accountable if those political leaders prove they are incapable of working together to accept the open hand of Europe and the good intentions of the world.

So with those observations I encourage you to have a fruitful conference and to remember, as you discuss the details of the challenges facing Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region today, to focus less on the well-known sources of division that may cause stagnation or regression, but to underscore first the broad areas of agreement that should lead to progress and a common future for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region as a whole.

Thank you for your attention.