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Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated 25 September 2020 on the human rights situation of refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Commission attaches the highest importance to the management of migration and asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina and is closely monitoring the situation. As underlined in our Communication “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” of 23 September, cooperation with the Western Balkans is key, and in particular coordination can help to ensure that the Western Balkans partners are well equipped as future Member States to respond constructively to shared challenges, developing their capacities and border procedures to bring them closer to the EU.

The Commission has consistently called upon Bosnia and Herzegovina’s authorities to ensure effective coordination, at all levels, of border management and migration management capacity, as well as the functioning of the asylum system - a key priority from the Commission’s Opinion on the country’s EU membership application. We have advocated for a sustainable migration management system, but also for a fair distribution of responsibilities across the country. We have also consistently called upon the authorities to ensure that refugees and migrants are treated with respect and dignity, in accordance with European and international law.

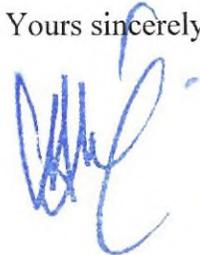
Ms Tineke Strik
Ms Bettina Vollath
Mr Dietmar Köster
Mr Fernando Barrena
Mr Domènec Ruiz Devesa
Mr Erik Marquardt
Ms Malin Björk
Mr Kostantinos Arvanitis
Ms Clare Daly
Ms Cornelia Ernst
Ms Özlem Alev Demirel
Mr Pierfrancesco Majorino
Mr Milan Brglez
Ms Saskia Bricmont
Mr Damien Carême

We have on numerous occasions, expressed concern about actions taken by the Una-Sana-Canton authorities in the past few months affecting refugees and migrants. We have condemned the use of violence, from whichever side, and called for thorough and effective investigations. In these demarches, we have also expressed concern about the failure to respect domestic legislation.

We have recently strongly condemned the unilateral action of the Una-Sana-Canton authorities to close the Bira reception centre in Bihac and forcibly transfer refugees and migrants to the COVID-19 emergency facility in Lipa, which was already at full capacity.

As you have indicated, the EU has provided considerable assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina to manage migration and asylum and will continue to provide necessary support. On 9 October, I was traveling to Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I address these matters with political leaders at the highest level. Together with the Minister of Security Selmo Cikotić, I followed up on the current migration situation in the country. I stressed the importance of effective coordination of border management, return operations, crackdown of illegal migration as well as the management of reception capacities, thus preventing a humanitarian crisis from unfolding. We will continue to monitor the situation closely, with our humanitarian partners on the ground, and seek to ensure that a sustainable solution is found.

Yours sincerely,



Olivér Várhelyi