

Brussels, 06/04/2021
A(2021)41082-870620

To all MEPs signatory to the letter calling for an urgent humanitarian action and EU long term response in Bosnia-and-Herzegovina

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 2 January 2021, in which you raise concerns regarding the migration situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The EU, and us three personally, has addressed the competent authorities on multiple occasions in the past months, both publicly and directly, urging them to act quickly to address the needs of all refugees and migrants without shelter and to save lives.¹ Commissioner Johansson has reiterated this call during her mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 17-18 February, where she visited the provisional camp in Lipa and met with the authorities at local and state levels.² She also stressed the need for Bosnia and Herzegovina to building an effective and long-term migration management and a functioning asylum system.

Following extensive EU engagement and support, including our direct advocacy at high-level and an EU experts' mission, the situation in Lipa has now improved and we hope that more positive changes will follow shortly. The authorities have set up heated tents that have a capacity to host around 900 persons and are provided with most basic services. However, this is a temporary solution to save lives, but not a sustainable one. As soon as all conditions are in place, such as road access, electricity and water connections, works for the establishment of a new reception centre should start. Alternative accommodation facilities for those persons still sleeping rough are also urgently required and should be established by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, taking into account the need for a fairer share of responsibility across the country. The country also needs to make the best use of the available resources, including by re-opening the fully equipped and EU-funded reception centre Bira in Bihać, as decided by Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers.

¹ HRVP Borrell blog. Bosnia and Herzegovina: the migration crisis is far from over (05.01.2021): https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91182/bosnia-and-herzegovina-migration-crisis-far-over_en; Press release from meeting of Ambassadors with BiH Minister of Security on the extremely concerning migration situation (02.01.2021): <http://europa.ba/?p=71246>; BiH: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the migrant situation in Una-Sana Canton (31.12.2020): <http://europa.ba/?p=71233>; BiH: Statement by Ylva Johansson, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, on migrant winter shelter crisis in Lipa (31.12.2020): <http://europa.ba/?p=71226>; EU statement on the migration situation in BiH (23.12.2020): <http://europa.ba/?p=71178>; Bosnia and Herzegovina: Statement by High Representative/Vice President Josep Borrell, Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson and Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhegyi, on the migration situation (21.12.2020): https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_20_2509

² Commissioner Johansson in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania (16/02.21): https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/migration-commissioner-johansson-bosnia-and-herzegovina-and-albania_en

The Commission has provided considerable financial and technical support to Bosnia and Herzegovina to better manage migration and asylum and to provide humanitarian assistance, for a total of EUR 89 million since 2018. The Commission adopted a EUR 25 million assistance package in December 2020,³ as well as an additional EUR 3.5 million in humanitarian assistance to help the most vulnerable refugees and migrants in the country.⁴

The authorities must take the political decisions required to build a sustainable migration and asylum system, with a fair distribution of reception centres across the country, ensuring both dignified accommodation and the security of the citizens. This message was once more conveyed to the authorities during Commissioner Johansson's recent visit.

The work of civil society and the media is fundamental in ensuring political accountability and the respect of human rights in a democratic state. The EU will continue to advocate for unfettered humanitarian access and expects zero tolerance of violence and threats against journalists.

As regards your proposal for the humanitarian resettlement of persons from Lipa to the EU, as well as the call for safe and legal pathways, let us recall that resettlement is an act of solidarity to provide durable solutions to recognised refugees who are stuck in host countries that are overwhelmed and need international assistance. The persons in Lipa, beyond addressing their immediate needs, require individual assessments of their migration status. This is the responsibility of the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities.

The EU will continue supporting the country in building an effective migration management and a functioning asylum system, in respect of human rights and of European and international standards.

We will remain actively engaged on this matter and will continue monitoring the situation on the ground closely in cooperation with humanitarian partners, including the International Organisation for Migration and the Danish Refugee Council. We appreciate your continued support in seeking a sustainable solution and conveying the same clear messages to Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities.

Yours faithfully,



Josep Borrell Fontelles



Ylva Johansson



Oliver Várhelyi

³ EU supports Bosnia and Herzegovina in managing migration with additional €25 million (16.12.2020): <http://europa.ba/?p=71071>

⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina: EU allocates additional €3.5 million to support vulnerable refugees and migrants (03.01.2021): <http://europa.ba/?p=71262>