

# Interview with Ambassador Brian Aggeler Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Dnevni avaz**  
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## **1. Your mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina has lasted for about half a year. An ungrateful question considering all the events, especially in the last 15 days or so, but how do you see the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina?**

Since commencing my official responsibilities just after the General Elections, I have engaged in dialogue with political figures belonging to both the ruling parties and the opposition at all levels and across BiH.

The political situation in this country is challenging. The continued use of inflammatory rhetoric, divisive politics and agendas and efforts to undermine the effective functioning of BiH institutions denies the ability of citizens to live in a stable, secure and prosperous environment. Free media finds itself throttled as journalists face intimidation and pressure. Education is used as a tool to divide rather than unite, whilst corruption and nepotism kill economic growth at its very roots. Most worryingly, it seems those who are determined to divide communities and engage in unacceptable behaviour do so because they face a largely consequence-free environment.

That said, in spite of the recent negative headlines, we have also seen encouraging signals- and this at all levels of government. These include the swift appointment of a new convocation of the BiH Council of Ministers. This momentum must be used to expedite long-awaited reforms and move BiH forward.

Also – and most importantly – citizens across the country are working across ethnic and entity lines to build the futures they deserve. Immediately after arriving in BiH, I made it a priority to visit all eight OSCE Mission field offices across this beautiful country and held discussions with local leaders, civil society representatives, and citizens. I saw dozens of inspiring stories in places like Bosanski Petrovac and Majevisa reigon, indicating a broad will among local communities to move forward in the interest of all.

It is crucial to move away from the politics of confrontation that ultimately harms everyone in this country. We urge all political leaders to prioritize the interests of the citizens and work together towards common goals for the benefit of everyone.

**2. BiH is in an unenviable position when it comes to media freedom, and the criminalization of defamation in the Republika Srpska entity will further complicate the work of journalists, which is expected to spill over to the Federation as well. We are getting closer and closer to a stalemate, is there a way out of it for the media and journalists, given that we brag to be a democratic country?**

The reinstatement of the criminal offense of defamation in the RS Criminal Code is a highly regressive step, particularly given the already poor state of media freedom in RS, where only a handful of independent outlets operate in a challenging environment.

If adopted, the amendments will not only have an effect on the media and journalists, but also on human rights defenders, academics and ordinary citizens who wish to express their opinion about important topics. It will silence the few remaining critical voices and it would benefit only those in power. It will hurt everyone else.

The solution is clear: this draft needs to be withdrawn. Addressing the challenges facing media freedom in BiH will require a concerted effort by all stakeholders, including the government, judiciary, civil society, and the media itself. By working together and implementing the necessary reforms, it is possible to create a more open and democratic society where journalists can contribute to the free flow of information and ideas.

**3. The Government of RS, at the proposal of entity President Milorad Dodik, cut off contacts with the American and British embassies and their representatives. How smart are such decisions when it comes to international institutions, what do they lead to?**

I don't think that this is constructive or helpful. As I previously mentioned, this kind of behavior ultimately harms citizens the most. It is crucial that political leaders throughout the country work to solve longstanding issues, turbocharge reforms and ultimately make life better for all, rather than creating such distractions.

**4. The OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and now you as an Ambassador, has always provided support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, both to institutions and authorities and to citizens. How do you see BiH in the future - in the EU and NATO or...?**

Let me be clear - Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with enormous potential. As the country is at a crossroads, I hope its leaders opt for a path that ensures a prosperous future, with opportunities for young people, with quality education, healthcare and life chances. There is absolutely no reason why BiH cannot have a strong rule of law; good governance; and stability and security. However, my view and the views of others in the international community are not what matters. What matters is how the citizens of BiH see their country, how **you** see **your country**.

It is essential that the people of this country fully understand and engage in the political process and hold their elected leaders accountable.

The potential for positive change lies within all of us. I have seen, during my trips to many communities, citizens and local leaders who have recognized that it is only through collaboration, engagement, and a sense of shared responsibilities and concerns that they can progress toward a future that benefits all their citizens.

**5. Recently, together with Ambassador Murphy, ICT equipment was allocated to anti-corruption bodies throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. How important and why is the fight against corruption, which is surely the cancer of our society?**

Corruption permeates every aspect of society, including elections, the judiciary, health, institutions, employment, general services and even rebuilding trust. It has a harmful impact on the daily lives of everyone here at all levels. For this reason, the fight against corruption is a top priority of our Mission. We will continue to invest much effort, together with our partners, to help this country eradicate this social cancer for good. The equipment is an important tool, but it is political will that is the key in the fight against corruption.