

Balkan Insight

NEWS 14 OCT 13

EU to Cut Bosnia Funds Over Reform Failure

The EU is set to cut 47 million euro of assistance after Bosnian politicians again failed to agree electoral reforms to allow all ethnicities to run for high office.

Elvira M. Jukic | BIRN | Sarajevo

The EU said it would cut the financial assistance after Bosnian politicians last week failed to agree a deal to implement a 2009 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that the country must change its electoral legislation.

Andy McGuffie, head of communications with the EU delegation to Bosnia, told Balkan Insight that Bosnia would not now be getting around half of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds that it had previously expected.

“The procedure has been started to redirect about 47 million euro of financial assistance that was heading to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the IPA 2013 programme,” McGuffie said.

He explained that it would be difficult to justify approving financial assistance to a country which has made no progress on its EU membership path.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina is sanctioning itself by not taking the steps. It is delaying the possibility of a better life to its citizens,” he said.

Bosnian politicians met EU enlargement commissioner Stefan Fule in Brussels last week in an attempt to work out an agreement to comply with the European rights court ruling.

The ‘Sejdic and Finci’ ruling came after a Bosnian Roma and a Bosnian Jew successfully challenged legislation that only allows candidates from the three largest ethnic groups, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, to run for parliament.

Alida Vracic of the Sarajevo-based think tank Popolari said that Bosnia’s politicians should sort out the situation at home before returning to Brussels.

“Until we see solutions within the country, I don’t see any reason to have high-level meetings. Here we have problems with electricity, gas, water; meanwhile they are having high-level dialogues,” Vracic said.

She added that she expects to see a period when not much will happen in terms of Bosnia’s progress towards the EU path because even the removal of financial assistance hadn’t forced politicians to come to an agreement.

“It would be best to wrap up things here and then speak of some EU integration process,” she said.

The failure to achieve progress is likely to be reflected in the upcoming EU progress report on Bosnia, although the EU has expressed hope that a breakthrough can still be achieved.