

**NATO Headquarters Sarajevo**
NHQSA TALKING POINTS

Bosnia and Herzegovina



BG McGaha (OCOM) remarks
Change of Command Ceremony. 10 May 2024

Good morning your Excellencies, ministers, fellow general officers and distinguished guests.

And thank you for joining us today to mark the Change of Command for NATO Headquarters Sarajevo.

After two and a half years in BiH, let me start by saying I owe an immense debt of gratitude to so many people.

Admiral Munsch: Sir, I want to thank you, and also Admiral Burke, as well as General Cavoli, and Major General Van Wagenen for the wisdom and guidance you have provided, and for your trust in affording me the privilege of leading this incredible mission.

My thanks also go to the teams on the International Staff in NATO HQ in Brussels who have been unwavering in showing the Allies' commitment to lasting peace and security for the citizens of BiH. And who have proven that NATO is willing to match our words with actions: with enhanced support and a historic series of visits, to include the Secretary General, the Chairman of the Military Committee and the North Atlantic Council.

Thank you to the international community - who work tirelessly to strengthen BiH's vital institutions.

Most notably, to the men and women in the Armed Forces and at the Ministries of Defence and Security. You represent the very best of BiH. Your dedication, professionalism and unity exemplify what can be achieved when focus is on building a more positive future. Your achievement in accrediting the Light Infantry Battalion group to international standards is testament to this - and we look forward to the day when the whole of the Armed Forces are trained, equipped and accommodated to NATO standards.

And, last but by no means least, to my team of experts at NATO Headquarters Sarajevo, who have supported me so skilfully. Our successful 20 year partnership with BiH, is the result of your service and sacrifice. I owe you, and your families, a huge debt of gratitude.

Thank you.

Over the last two years there is so much we have achieved together.

We have deepened the connections between BiH and our nations – with enhanced support that will help BiH institutions increase their resilience against modern security challenges, to include terrorism, cyber attacks, natural disasters and malign influence.

We have helped make BiH safer, with the combined efforts of the EU, OSCE and a large number of embassies, supporting an agreement that will speed up disposal rates of surplus ammunition and explosives, **and assist in emptying non-prospective property sites for handover.**

In partnership with organisations including the UN, the BiH Gender Equality Agency, border and police forces, as well as the Ministry of Defence and armed forces, we have highlighted women working in every capacity in the fields of defence, security and diplomacy; to ensure equal competition based on



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merit; and to cement the idea that ensuring gender equality in these sectors is not a “womens rights” issue, it’s a security imperative.

And, with the invaluable support of NATO’s contact point Embassy, Norway, and a number of Allied ambassadors, we have promoted the enduring values of our Alliance-and elevated informed debate on issues that underpin our collective security, and way of life.

To Brigadier General Valas: Matt, there are very few roles like this anywhere in the military. I am confident your perspective will help advance our partnership with this wonderful country. I promise you that you are about to embark on the two most fulfilling years of your career.

You will see from the size of the audience here today, that we have a huge number of friends in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Friends who share NATO’s vision for a safer world for all, where sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law are respected, and every nation is free to choose its own path.

Friends who understand that strong state institutions secure peace. And that the Armed Forces of BiH is essential to regional stability, while also providing employment and training opportunities for young people at home.

Friends who share our commitment to helping BiH benefit from the better future that Euro-Atlantic integration has proven to bring.

It has been said that Bosnia is a place “where hospitality is a way of life and beauty lies in the diversity of its landscapes and people”. It’s a sentiment I have certainly found to be true. It left its mark on me during my first deployment to the region, and now with the new friendships I have developed I now have many more reasons to return.

Thank you again for welcoming me back to BiH, with such warmth. And for the incredible privilege of Commanding this mission and working alongside you all.