

Institute of Regional Studies

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REGIONAL TIES: BALKANS AND SOUTH ASIA

ISLAMABAD December 19, 2019: "Pakistan needs to use the Balkans as a bridge to Europe," said Brig. Gen. (Retd.) Sakib Foric, the Ambassador of Bosnia to Pakistan. He gave these remarks while speaking at a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies here on Thursday. He further added that Pakistan could capitalize on the trade and investment opportunities in the Balkans, especially Bosnia, because other regional countries like India were not that focused on the region.



Appreciating Pakistan's support to the Bosnian refugees during the Balkans war and supporting its UN mission in completing membership documentation of various UN bodies, Amb. Foric stated that Pakistan was among the first few countries to recognize Bosnia soon after its independence. Further discussing the similarities between the people of Bosnia and Pakistan, Amb. Foric shared that like Pakistan most of the Bosnians were also Sunni Muslims following the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. Another similarity between Pakistan and Bosnia, Amb. Foric argued, was that both had good relations with Turkey.

Lamenting the limited trade and investment relations between Pakistan and Bosnia, Amb. Foric said that there was very little Pakistani investment in Bosnia. He mentioned the number of Pakistani owned businesses in Bosnia as around 50, mostly small shops or retail businesses. Amb. Foric was of the view that since Bosnia was an energy-surplus country and energy prices were low, it was a good destination for investment. He added that there were only 22 Pakistanis studying in Bosnian universities despite the fact that there were some very good universities in Bosnia. Similarly, he shared that there were only 20 Bosnians living in Pakistan around 10 of whom were residing in Islamabad. Most of the refugee families who had come to Pakistan during the war had left the country, according to Amb. Foric.

Amb. Foric added that although Pakistan and Bosnia were negotiating a preferential trading agreement no free trade agreement had been signed between the two countries, which had limited the trade potential of the two countries. He regretted that Bosnia and Pakistan only had 7 operational ratified agreements between them, which, he believed, was quite less. He said that the market for Pakistani rice, mangoes, and furniture in Bosnia could be explored by Pakistani traders. He added that another limiting factor in Pakistan-Bosnia economic relations was the lack of direct flights between the two countries. He urged Pakistanis to focus on value additions to their exports of commodities. He maintained that while Pakistani leather was very good, the Pakistani finished leather products like shoes and jackets were not trendy.

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Talking about his life in Pakistan, Amb. Foric shared that he received a tremendous amount of affection from Pakistanis wherever he shared that he was from Bosnia. He shared that he had travelled to Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Gwadar, Quetta, as well as Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan. He expressed his profound appreciation for the hardworking spirit of Pakistanis and the remarkably beautiful tourist destinations in the country. He called for improving tourism infrastructure in Pakistan for further enhancing Pakistan's international tourism potential.

Amb. Foric shared that Bosnia had attracted 1.8 million foreign tourists last year. He further added that Bosnia had received a large amount of investment in residential real estate from the Arab countries. He estimated the total number of homes built by Arabs in Bosnia in the last few years at more than 100,000. He shared that since the Middle Eastern summers were very hot, many Arabs had invested in real estate in Bosnia to visit in summers. He shared that complete Arab villages had been established by investors from the Arab countries in the suburbs of Bosnian cities like the capital Sarajevo. During his talk at IRS, Amb. Foric also shared details about the geography, demography, and culture of Bosnia.

President IRS Dr. Rukhsana Qamber thanked Amb. Foric for his highly engaging and informative talk. She shared that she had travelled to Bosnia and had found the Bosnian people very friendly toward foreign tourists. She also shared that she found visiting Bosnian mosques particularly good.