

Op-ed by High Representative Valentin Inzko: Make politicians work for you

To say that this year has been challenging would be an understatement. All our lives have turned upside down and many of our daily routines also had to be changed. Things we took for granted were no longer there, and in the blink of an eye, we had to reorganize and adjust to new circumstances, to this sometimes intimidating world of electronic communication. The fact that in such extraordinary circumstances, with exposure to serious health risks, your small team managed to keep the newspaper alive is a great achievement. Chapeau!

Recent months have reminded us all how important the role of the media is, especially in times of crisis. Yours is a key role in providing accurate and reliable information to the public, while adhering to the highest professional and ethical standards. That is a huge responsibility and you carry it with you 24/7. Your job is demanding and overwhelming even in the best of circumstances, and now with the pandemic, it is more challenging than ever.

It is not a ground shaking conclusion to say that more challenges lie ahead. The election campaign will soon start. Some argue that political parties in BiH are perpetually in campaign mode, which is not far from the truth. Public discourse is filled with big topics, centuries-old issues resurrect almost on a monthly basis, grand plans are proposed from all sides, big words are flying around like unguided missiles, shot into the air with no consideration whatsoever as to whom they can hurt or what their consequences might be. At the same time, life on the ground goes on, following a different pattern. And that is the one where you have to buy school books for your kids, sneakers, winter jackets, where you have to decide whether to take your father to see an oncologist privately and pay quite a sum for it or risk and wait for an exam scheduled for May 2021, by which time it may be too late.

During previous election cycles, we have seen that political elite seems to have a little or no respect at all for their voters. If they had, they would not base their campaign on divisive rhetoric, on insults against other ethnic or religious groups or on conspiracy theories. If only all that energy invested in creation of all kind of enemies waiting at every corner would be channelled differently, things in this country would change with amazing speed. I have seen it happen, and I believe it can happen here. This campaign can be different, it can be about addressing practical challenges people face every day. And I urge all candidates to focus on these real life, day-to-day issues instead of following the existing pattern of stoking fear with divisive rhetoric.

I hope also that after elections, there will be time and political will, to implement the Mostar agreement regarding the elections in Mostar and the election law, to implement the case of Sejdic – Finci and other related cases, all Constitutional Courts cases, including the equality of all constituent people and Others on all the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I have met many people from BiH throughout Europe. They are decent, hardworking people, law-abiding citizens, just like most other Europeans. And they all have these two things in common: love for their home country and sadness that they had to leave for reasons that can be resolved, if only those in power, with mandate given to them by the people, would make a different list of priorities. Whenever I speak with those who left or are getting ready to leave, the rule of law, or the lack of it, is at the top of their list of reasons for leaving, every single time.

I am a firm believer that the status quo can be changed for the better. And it is in local communities where the change usually starts. This year, it is the local elections, you will know most of the people on the lists. For certain, there are those who are ordinary citizens just like you, who decided to run to make things better, build schools, repair roads, improve living conditions for all. Choose them. Ignore all the noise, vote for those who are ready to address your concerns. And make sure you hold them to their promises.