

Op-ed by High Representative: Focus in 2015 should be on sustainability, speed and the future

2014 could have been a better year in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In February the frustration and anger of hard-pressed citizens was reflected in protests across the country. There was a short period in which indignation spilled over into violence – but by far the most notable aspect of these demonstrations was that they were peaceful and that in subsequent meetings citizens organized themselves and formulated demands and programmes that pointed the way towards getting the country out of its present difficulties.

In other words, citizens did what many of their elected representatives had for the most part been failing to do.

Then came the floods in May, which had a direct and catastrophic impact throughout the country and which delivered a blow to an already fragile economy. Their effects are still being felt. Once again, citizens did what many of their elected representatives failed to do.

They came together, everyday people and local communities across the country came together, spontaneously, to help each other to rebuild, regardless of ethnicity or what part of the country they were living in. There was an outburst of goodness.

Moving forward from the October General Elections, those who hold political office should follow the peoples' lead and show the same determination to come together to resolve the problems faced by all, foremost the economy, to the benefit of all.

For this to happen, elected leaders need to understand the imperative need for change.

When considering their planning, thinking and acting, governments at all levels should keep in mind:

- Whatever they do, in any area and at any level, it should be sustainable;

- Whatever they do, there should be a sense of urgency and acceleration;
- Whatever they do, it should be future oriented.

For that to happen, the process of forming legislatures and governments – which is considerably further advanced than was the case at this time four years ago – must be completed, and the new authorities must get down to work.

As I said after the December meeting of the Peace Implementation Council, there is absolutely no mystery about what needs to be done. There is broad support for a series of economic initiatives that could have a positive impact.

We also need to see a considerable acceleration in the response to the floods, so that assistance is extended to those who remain most vulnerable and so that necessary measures are taken to prevent and lessen the impact of future such disasters.

In addition, there needs to be a serious and strengthened effort to tackle the appalling corruption that is holding Bosnia and Herzegovina and its entities back from making real progress. This means further strengthening the judicial system so that corrupt politicians and bureaucrats and well-connected criminals are held to account.

Looking to young people, the future of the country, Bosnia and Herzegovina's elected governments and parliaments will need to do more to improve the tragically low level of youth employment and to advance decisively with education reform aiming at improving standards, eliminating segregation and ensuring inclusiveness.

In 2015, we also need to see authorities at all levels respecting and implementing the decisions of courts and upholding the rule of law. For example, I expect the full implementation of the Constitutional Court's ruling on Mostar, with Mostar remaining a single, coherent, multi-ethnic unit of local self-government, with some level of local authority/administration below that of the city.

Progress can be made in all these areas if elected leaders focus on practical government. The recent elections and the New Year offer a fresh start in 2015.

Elected leaders need to pursue constructive and realistic policies in the interests of the citizens. If they do so, they will find willing partners in the international community.