

Remarks by HR Valentin Inzko at a conference organized by the Pan-European Union

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Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko At a Conference Organized by the Pan-European Union Sarajevo, 25 October 2014

A Pragmatic and Ambitious Strategy for Getting Things Done

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all say what a pleasure it is to be here and to participate in a forum that brings together stakeholders from Bosnia and Herzegovina and representatives of international institutions that are making a major contribution to this country's social, economic and political rehabilitation.

We are meeting at an opportune time – in the aftermath of the general election. The change in the political environment brought about by the election has been incremental, but as we enter the phase of forming new authorities we can nonetheless take advantage of the momentum that comes from a fresh start, even a modest fresh start.

I believe it's important to emphasize that the change that Bosnia and Herzegovina now needs, the change that so many stakeholders, from inside the country and from outside, want to see – this change does not depend on whatever mathematical majority may be formed in the coming weeks. It depends on a pragmatic and ambitious strategy for getting things done.

We are familiar with the preoccupations and calculations that accompany the distribution of posts – a current that runs through coalition building not just in Bosnia and Herzegovina but in other countries too. And we are aware of the poor results that follow when the distribution of posts is the end in itself, rather than being seen as simply the first and necessary step in the challenging business of getting those posts to function efficiently for the benefit of citizens.

Getting the ministries to function in a coherent, coordinated and effective way is the most important order of business in the present post-election phase – and this will not happen unless there is a major change of mentality on the part of many senior officials.

But change is not impossible.

Indeed, the need for change in Bosnia and Herzegovina has never been more pressing or more apparent – citizens have come out onto the streets to remind their representatives of this on several different occasions in the last eighteen months.

The priority of the new authorities must be to address the worsening economic situation and initiate a deep-rooted, systematic and rapid program that will start to create jobs. This is completely interwoven with the European integration agenda. Reforms that can help turn the economy around are at the top of that agenda.

In a recent survey of citizens throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina almost three quarters of respondents cited **unemployment** as the most important issue that their politicians should address after the elections. Unemployment outstripped every other topic.

As well as practical and timely economic reforms we need to see a renewed focus on addressing the hardship that the spring floods continue to bring to tens of thousands of families around the country – the international response to the catastrophe was rapid and practical, but implementation of aid programs on the ground has been patchy and slow.

These and other challenges need to be tackled in the context of a coherent agenda for government.

And that agenda has to be fundamentally rooted in the rule of law.

Respect for the rule of law means implementation of the Constitutional Court's decisions, in the case of Mostar, in respect to state property, and in other key areas.

The challenge facing the new authorities is huge: the response to that challenge must be ambitious, focused and strategic.

The administrations now being formed will not be judged on the basis of who sits in which seat. They will be judged on the basis of their capacity to get things done.

Thank you.