

Op-ed by High Representative Valentin Inzko: Elections based on issues, not fear

By Valentin Inzko

In recent days we have heard a new round of spurious statements from the leadership in Republika Srpska challenging Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which are enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement and guaranteed under international law. It is both senseless and fruitless for politicians to continue contesting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina that was internationally recognised in 1992 and so clearly defined in the Dayton Peace Agreement.

There is only one state on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that is Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is absolutely clear on this point; indeed, this fact is enshrined in the preamble and in the very first paragraph of the very first article of the Constitution. The sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina was unanimously admitted to the United Nations in 1992 and its current internal structure subsequently defined by Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the Constitution.

Some of those who talk this way probably believe that it will distract voters from the fact that the political class has become more and more wealthy, even as in the last eight years the painfully small rise in household incomes has been outstripped by increases in the cost of living. Some of them probably think that it will distract voters from the fact that the average pension is well below the level required to support the average pensioner. Some of them probably think that it will distract voters' attention from the high

unemployment rate.

Those people are wrong. These elections are not going to be won and lost by empty promises of secession or cheap attempts to confront the International Community and other ethnic groups.

These elections are going to be won and lost on the basis of who can deliver the real change the people of this country want, regardless of where they live and what their name is. The real change people want is clear in every corner of this land: an end to corruption, equal access to jobs, and the hope of a dignified and better life for them, their families and their neighbours.

We in the International Community hear the people of this country. We hear the protesters who have been demonstrating peacefully, we hear the workers who have been brought to their knees. We hear you loud and clear and we support your aspirations.

We can all see that there are political leaders who have delivered years of hardship and who would rather talk about referendums than about what they intend to do in the next six months to address the mounting problems citizens are facing.

Let me blunt, the time of cheap tricks designed to raise tensions and to divert attention from the real challenges facing the country is over. The time has come for politicians who can deliver concrete solutions to the growing and very real problems facing ordinary people and the country as a whole.

My message is clear. The Constitution makes it absolutely clear that the Republika Srpska and the Federation as two entities are parts of the sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, the Constitution allows no possibility for either entity to secede. This is a fact not open to historical debate. Threats of unilateral changes to the

constitutional order of the country and talk of holding a referendum to challenge the fundamentals of Dayton only serve to deepen divisions in the country. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country along with its constitutional order are secure. We as the International Community are the guarantors of this. And we will take the necessary actions to continue to guarantee this country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

So please, in the months ahead do not allow yourselves to be manipulated by politicians peddling fear and empty promises. Do not allow politicians to put fear in your heart based on threats that no longer exist. Continue to make sure your voice is heard in peaceful and productive ways. Elections are an important tool in a democracy, and I urge citizens to use the pre-election season and the elections themselves to demand accountability from elected leaders. This means an election based on issues, not fear. This means leaders focused on serving the people, instead of themselves. This means leaders focused on engaging with citizens and working with the international community to develop solutions to this country's challenges and moving Bosnia and Herzegovina forward.

I know that the people of this country do not want to listen to messages of fear, division and hatred anymore. In contrast to some politicians, the people of this country are full of talent, good will and energy to build a successful country together. It is this same vision that they are looking for from the politicians asking for their vote in October 2014.