

Op-ed by HR Valentin Inzko: Twenty Years of Peace

The Dayton Agreement ended three and a half years of war, has kept the peace for the last two decades and brought BiH to the doorstep of the EU application process.

Now is a good time to look back and see what was done with those years of peace, and also to look forward to see what more can be achieved.

Working with the International Community after the war, the BiH authorities established the Central Bank, launched the Convertible Mark, and set up the indirect tax system and a series of bodies necessary to regulate a modern economy. They created the BiH Armed Forces, the State Border Police and other agencies that are responsible for protecting citizens. Bosnia and Herzegovina was integrated into international structures – BiH peacekeepers are today deployed on UN missions overseas. And while all of this was being done, the country's wrecked infrastructure – schools, hospitals, roads – was repaired.

A lot was achieved in that first decade of peace implementation.

However, the last ten years, as we all know, have seen far less progress to say the least. Of course, there have been constructive and inclusive BiH politicians, but they have been largely sidelined in the last decade by leaders who have clung to the old ways of thinking and conducting politics.

The painful failure to get things done hasn't been caused by Dayton. The BiH constitution isn't the simplest in the world – but it worked well enough in the decade after the war. The reason it hasn't worked well since then is that the politicians whose job it is to make it work haven't been doing their jobs.

A renewed commitment to making Dayton work is not a minor matter; it is fundamental to the future of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the twentieth anniversary of Dayton, I think a message should be sent to all BiH citizens: you must take politics into your own hands. Progress is possible. We have seen this in recent months as the authorities adopted a Reform Agenda worked out with the European Union. This plan has a real chance of improving the lives of BiH citizens. It has the support of the International Community, which will provide practical help if such help is requested.

If we can introduce these reforms and stop the decline in living standards, then there will be a real basis for political progress.

This isn't a dream – what seems impossible today may be possible tomorrow if we have a determination to build a new and modern Bosnia and Herzegovina, and if we have a real will for change. The first decade after Dayton with its tremendous achievements has shown that it can be done!