

Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko at a Public Forum Organized by the European Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Milici, 23 February 2018

More Engagement by Young People Will make a Difference

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking Predrag Prastalo and Stefan Milic for organizing today's event, and let me also express my thanks to all of you for coming along to take part in this discussion. I have been asked to make an introduction on the actual situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the social engagement and role of young people.

Earlier this month, the European Commission's Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans was adopted, which reconfirmed the European future of the region. This is good news. The strategy includes a set of initiatives, and is in my view one of the most comprehensive packages we have seen in the past decade.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is today a country at peace, where significant efforts were put into rebuilding the country and its institutions. Although we are beyond the reconstruction of the country, it has to continue to develop. To me the starting point is an efficient and well-functioning Rule of Law system, where the police, judges and prosecutors are professional and independent and recruited based on their merit. A system where no one is above the law. Highways are to come and with a solid rule of law system, foreign investors will be attracted to come to BiH. This means increased job opportunities in the real sector.

But to get there we also need more social engagement from citizens, including a higher level of participation in the elections by young people. The social engagement is related to participation in activities where there is a collective interest. This could be a centre for youth, a park for kids to play, a football stadium or an adult education centre or anything else which would improve your society. With your voices through an initiative to the municipal council, you can make changes in your communities.

This brings me to 2018 being an Election year, I would like to take this opportunity to ask you all to execute your democratic right on the Election Day – go out and vote!

Voting is also a start of a social engagement and social engagement has been identified with improved happiness and health and well-being, so let's do something about this now!

Looking at a study on youth conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I see that 63% of youth is unemployed, which comes down to 180,000 unemployed youth, another 115,000 are students at universities. The study shows moreover, that

only 50 percent of those employed work in their chosen profession, 25 percent has dropped out of school and 27 percent is not seeking jobs and only 10 percent volunteer in some way.

On the top of this we have an accelerated trend where many people including young people are leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina for a better life elsewhere.

This is not a good picture!

I would like to see the BiH authorities supporting young people and even declaring 2018 as the year of youth by working on a strategic legal framework with the aim to stop further brain drain of young BiH citizens. This will not happen without directed actions.

I would turn to politicians and say let's make this come through, I would like to turn to young people, students, employed or unemployed let's get organised through a social engagement and work on this.

In particular, I would encourage young people from different communities, different professional walks of life, different cantons and different entities to find areas of common interest and to work together to make your voices

heard more clearly.

People of all ages have different identities and perspectives, but if you can define the areas where you have common interests – higher employment, less corruption, better educational opportunities, and so on – you can make a difference.

I would along with my office get personally engaged if needed. However, lets not wait for somebody to do this – but get involved now!!!

Thank you.