



Op-ed by the High Representative: Time to re-think

The election campaign will start in the coming days. In many countries, politicians tend to use more direct and controversial rhetoric during this period to motivate voters. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, divisive rhetoric is not used only in the pre-election period, but throughout the mandate. As a matter of fact, standards of public discourse have been dropping.

Insults against other ethnic and religious groups, political rivals, International Community representatives and even individual citizens have become a constant, part of political behavior and method. Because they have no real progress to show, certain BiH politicians design conspiracy theories, to replace serious discussions on real problems that affect the well-being of their citizens. Moreover, nationalistic rhetoric is frequently used as a cover for satisfying other personal interests.

Regardless of this unfortunate trend, I believe that the majority of BiH citizens know that the negative rhetoric is designed to divert attention from the failure of many of those in authority to do their jobs. Because while the constitutional order of the country can sometimes make decision-making difficult, many of the problems that impact citizens such as corruption, a poor business climate and impunity by some from the rule of law could be improved by those in power, if more elected politicians made tackling these problems a priority.

Unfortunately, irresponsible and aggressive rhetoric can have real world consequences, intended or unintended, by creating a climate of intolerance or hatred against certain groups or individuals, as we have seen recently with some attacks against journalists. Fortunately, reality and facts cannot be changed, not in the case of Srebrenica or in any other case.

Reality always hits back, one way or another, sooner or later. Unfortunately, ordinary people usually suffer the most, certainly more than political elites, who can afford to live in a parallel world to their citizens. And the reality is that relative stagnation of BiH and its entities is due to the lack of focus on real issues by some BiH politicians, who concentrate disproportionately on ethnic agendas and blocking the country. This has motivated many of the best and brightest in BiH to leave the country. This is the real tragedy of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From that perspective, citizens of all ethnic groups share an interest in electing politicians, who are ready to address the concerns of ordinary people, not the needs of politicians or political parties. They should not, yet again, fall under the illusion created by some political leaders that their ethnic group is under attack. They should simply not be afraid as there is nothing to be afraid of. The atmosphere of fear is purposely created by some politicians to guide the citizens' choice on Election Day.

And so I would appeal to voters ahead of the Elections, and to candidates who aspire to public office, to think rationally about their real needs: political stability, security and safety, more jobs, better salaries, better roads, better schooling system, a better health care system.... These are the issues that really matter.