

Real and positive change is possible



The Dayton Peace Agreement “gives no one the right to challenge the country or its people,” the High Representative, Valentin Inzko, told participants at an international conference yesterday.

Speaking at an online symposium on the legacy of the Dayton Peace Agreement organised by the Yale University Genocide Studies Program and the Southern Connecticut State University Office of Academic Affairs, the High Representative noted that “in poll after poll, BiH citizens identify the absence of the rule of law as the biggest threat to daily life.”

He said the practice of challenging or ignoring court decisions “is cancer that will ravage the body politic if it is not cut out.”

“As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement, we can look back on a series of achievements that have made life better for BiH citizens,” the High Representative said. “The first of these – the fundamental objective of the Agreement – is peace.” He said a swathe of reforms implemented in the post-war period “have provided Bosnia and Herzegovina with the institutional and legal infrastructure required to function as a modern democracy,” and that this “shows conclusively that progress is possible. Mistakes can be corrected, and difficult problems can be solved.”

However, he also stressed that today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is stagnating. "Its young people are leaving, and its principal political parties are mired in a system of patronage and corruption." All across the public sector, he said, "conscientious teachers and civil servants and utility workers and police officers and many, many more use their hard-won skills diligently and competently every day but they are poorly served by inadequate budgets and ponderous administration."

The High Representative insisted that this situation wasn't inevitable under the post-war settlement, and that "just as the International Community, coordinated by OHR, successfully delivered key elements of recovery in the decade after the war, it can successfully contribute to a social and political sea-change today." He said BiH citizens "have defied the worst excesses of their political representatives – regularly displaying in daily life a decency that is often absent from political life" and that "these same citizens, with robust and consistent support from international partners, can set the country on a new course."

The High Representative said, "grassroots stakeholders – citizen activists and NGOs – have the energy and the legitimacy to deliver real and positive change if we extend a cooperative hand."

He said the European Union "is undoubtedly the preeminent partner for Bosnia and Herzegovina when it comes to helping the country move towards the levels of prosperity and progress enjoyed elsewhere in the continent – and the coming municipal elections can boost this long-term process."

[Click here for the full text of the High Representative's speech.](#)