Op-ed by HR Valentin Inzko: Complete Collapse of Democratic Functionality in Zenica-Doboj Canton

The ruling authorities in Zenica-Doboj Canton have abandoned all pretence of representing the democratic interests of the good citizens of the canton. It is a false and cynical game it is playing with the voters. Moreover, it is an embarrassment.

On 25 June, the ruling majority dominated by SDA, A-SDA/NES, HDZ BiH, with the help of two DF representatives, adopted in the Zenica-Doboj Canton Assembly damaging and highly disruptive amendments to the cantonal Law on Internal Affairs, over the strong and well-known objections of US Ambassador Eric Nelson and myself. The amendments aim to put the policing system in Zenica-Doboj Canton under direct political control and threaten to undo years of investment and hard work by the international community in building professional police.

In my joint letter with Ambassador Nelson of 29 March, we outlined that the amendments do nothing to further professionalize the police, nor do they strengthen the rule of law and police independence. Rather, the amendments instead disrupt the career system and command structure of the Zenica-Doboj Police Administration.

Ambassador Nelson and I proposed a perfectly logical and reasonable solution: Redirect the amendments to a police-led working group of experts, including representatives from my office. Instead, the assembly decided to use the shortened procedure in considering the amendments which prevented a transparent public debate and expert discussions on the necessity of such amendments.

So I must ask: What motivated the government and their allies to not want to consider proposals from police experts, including my experts? And why proceed in a shortened procedure in the Assembly with no opportunity for transparent public debate? Is there any issue of greater concern for the honest, hard-working citizens of Zenica-Doboj Canton than professional police ensuring high-quality public security, safe streets and schools, and protection of life and property? Apparently, this is not the case for this government and their cohorts.

The answers to these basic questions reveal the degree to which the ruling coalition has descended into the anti-democratic black hole that is now Zenica-Doboj Canton, for everyone else in BiH to see. I imagine, like me, they are shaking their heads in disbelief.

Citizens really deserve better! Authorities should have another profound look and correct the issue and mistakes in question without delay.