

# Elections Can Invigorate Popular Demand for Reform

*Check against delivery*

**Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko  
at a conference on the Ethics of Peace and War  
Maribor, Slovenia**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the organisers for asking me to take part in this discussion. I wanted to join you here because I believe that the analysis offered by participants at this conference can provide valuable insights on practical policymaking.

The ethical dimension of policymaking is often sidelined by the supposedly immovable imperatives of political realism. This, in my view, almost always backfires in the long run.

The conflicts that today represent a threat to global security – in the Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Africa – may in many cases be a consequence of ethical compromises made, for what appeared to be sound political reasons, in the past.

I'm not saying that there shouldn't be compromise in politics. I'm saying that compromise shouldn't entail the capitulation of ethical values. Perhaps what we need is compromise based on a kind of "hard-nosed" ethics.

In the same way that the ethics of war revolve around whether or not the prosecution of a conflict may be viewed as just, so the ethics of peace revolve around justice.

All of us are familiar with the adage – take care of justice and peace will look after itself.

This doesn't cover the totality of peacemaking but it touches on a central truth, that the only durable peace is a just peace.

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Over the last two decades, peace has been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina in three broad phases.

The immediate post-war period witnessed an urgent humanitarian effort to relieve suffering in a country where some 100,000 had died and a further two million had been displaced in three and a half years of fighting.

By 2000 much of the physical damage had been repaired. This made it possible to launch a serious and sustained effort to develop a market economy and make the post-war political and administrative structure more efficient.

And the strategy worked.

For several years Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoyed the fastest economic growth of any country in Southeast Europe. At the same time, there appeared to be a realistic prospect of moving into a more constructive and productive political paradigm.

This prompted the International Community to begin the process of withdrawing from day-to-day intervention in the country's political life. Unfortunately, much of the domestic political establishment responded to this by embarking on a scramble for the perks of office and reverting to the kind of rhetoric and attitudes that preceded and accompanied the conflict.

There is no question that the largest share of the burden of ensuring a peaceful and prosperous future for Bosnia and Herzegovina rests with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the leaders they elect. And this is why the conduct and outcome of the general elections in October of this year will be so important.

But it is also the case that the international community has invested substantial material and political resources in an effort to reintegrate the country and its peoples since the end of the terrible 1992-1995 that claimed so many lives and resulted in so much misery.

And it is the case, I would argue, that the international community still has a moral responsibility to ensure that the country is irreversibly on the path to sustainable peace and prosperity. This means sending a clear and united message that we support those who choose the path of reform and we do not support those who seek political and economic gain through the politics of division.

The present political establishment has been entrenched since Dayton. It consists largely of people who define their own and other people's constituencies in terms of common cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics.

This is an approach that the International Community endorsed at Dayton. It is an approach reflected in the inordinately complex and inordinately inefficient government system. It is, some would argue, the consequence of a fundamental compromise that placed communitarian interests above the claims of individual citizens.

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At the same time, the achievements of post-war recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been substantial. However, they are far from complete – and today they are being rolled back by a nationalist minority who do not see any sort of ethical compromise in the Dayton settlement other than the fact that, in their view, it didn't go far enough in asserting the primacy of the community over the individual citizen.

We have seen BiH citizens respond to the country's growing material and political crisis with courage, dignity and a remarkable surge of energy. For more than a year now, through

popular demonstrations, plenums and cases of forthright and independent journalism civil society has addressed the glaring deficit – in competence as well as in ethics – of BiH political life.

It is clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina's political establishment has failed to ensure progress for their country in the last few years. With a general election in October, the people have an opportunity to change it.

Bosnia and Herzegovina does not comprise a handful of political leaders. It comprises four million well educated and currently very angry citizens. Those four million citizens must be consulted in a serious and substantial way. The election will be part of that consultation but there needs to be sustained dialogue with citizens after the election too. For one thing this could help to ensure that the protracted political stalemate and inaction that has followed previous general elections is not repeated.

The International Community must also consider the scale of its own ambition – do we want enough for Bosnia and Herzegovina?

If we truly believe that this country can be a prosperous, sovereign and secure market democracy – and I certainly do – then we cannot stand on the sidelines while necessary reforms are blocked by a self-interested minority and citizens are obliged to take to the streets in protest.

Citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina are demanding justice. Till now their demands have been resisted by the political establishment.

Faced with a popular demand for reform and the establishment's resistance to change, why shouldn't we come down on the side of reform?

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an example of how far a country can

go when the goodwill of citizens and the constructive engagement of the International Community come together. It is also an example of how this positive achievement can be undermined by a minority whose self interest is at variance with the general good.

I hope the wisdom and indignation of BiH citizens will be reflected at the ballot box in October. That would begin to restore a measure of ethical balance to a system that can succeed if the anomalies that were accepted at its inception are resolved.

Thank you