

The Fundamental Rights of BiH Citizens

When other parts of Europe were mired in religious or ideological intolerance, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a place where diversity was valued, High Representative Valentin Inzko told an international conference in Trieste today. He said this was the historical context in which the Jews who were expelled from Spain at the end of the 15th century found refuge in Sarajevo.

The High Representative was taking part in a conference on national minorities, organised by the Europe for Citizens project with the support of the European Parliament.

He said that Bosnia and Herzegovina is now recovering from a failed attempt to bring centuries of communal coexistence to an end and that progress had been possible because political and administrative guarantees have been established to protect the interests of the Constituent Peoples. However, he pointed out that “not only does Bosnia and Herzegovina have three Constituent Peoples: it has also 17 national minorities. And, as the Sejdic-Finci ruling has made clear, protecting the interests of one group can undermine the interests of other groups.”

The High Representative said that one way of resolving this contradiction is to develop a modern European concept of citizenship.

“If we advance and promote the concept of citizenship – and the interests of citizens – we are less likely to encounter mutually exclusive situations where the advantage of one group, one community, one Constituent People, one minority – national or otherwise – works to the disadvantage of another group, community, Constituent People or minority.”

He said the European concept of citizenship is consistent with Bosnia and Herzegovina's tradition of inclusiveness and he noted that "the recent upsurge of popular protest has brought together diverse groups – with no reference to communal or national identity but with an understanding that present conditions are an affront to the fundamental right of citizenship – the right to live and work in security and dignity."

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