

Speech by High Representative Valentin Inzko at “The Model United Nations”

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The Ultimate Authority in a Democracy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to the “Model United Nations in Mostar” team for asking me to speak. I hope today’s discussion will produce concrete conclusions – if you will permit me to offer a single piece of advice it is that a conference is only as useful as the concrete conclusions it produces.

And when you have your conclusions you must make sure they are brought to the attention of policymakers and the public.

That is how change happens!

International coordination

Let me begin by saying a few words about how the United Nations and the International Community bring assistance to parts of the world – including Bosnia and Herzegovina – where it is needed.

My appointment as High Representative was made by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council and endorsed by the UN Security Council. Twice a year I brief the Security Council on developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting opportunities and threats.

The Peace Implementation Council has 55 member governments and organisations, and the Security Council, as you know, has five permanent members and ten non-permanent members. The numbers themselves give an idea of the first challenge of international engagement – coordination.

At a basic level, one of the achievements of the UN – and in Bosnia and Herzegovina one of the achievements of the International Community as a whole – has been to develop a capacity for coordinated action. There are strains; there are endless discussions – but the fact is that people from different cultures, different political systems, speaking different languages and with very different levels of resources, have been able to come together and implement coherent policies, generally with some success.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the role of the OHR, specified in the Dayton Peace Agreement, addresses this fundamental challenge, as, among other things, the High Representative is mandated to “coordinate the activities of the organizations and agencies involved in the civilian aspects of the peace settlement”.

Where there’s a will there’s a way

The Dayton Peace Agreement ended more than three years of conflict. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – including those who were born after 1995 – are still living in the shadow of that conflict and the priority must be to ensure that a legacy of mistrust and hatred does not poison future generations.

Dayton ended the war, and the vast majority of citizens in 1995 were grateful for that. Criticism of Dayton should always be placed in this broader context. The Agreement has kept the peace for nearly two decades.

Dayton also left Bosnia and Herzegovina with an exceptionally complicated political and administrative structure designed to ensure power-sharing among the Constituent Peoples.

And over the years, this structure has demonstrated that where there’s a will there’s a way.

When there has been a will to make the Dayton constitution work, it has worked, for the most part.

In the first few years of the 21st century, for example, effective economic and political reforms made Bosnia and Herzegovina the fastest growing economy in Southeast Europe. Sensible policies delivered tangible results – more jobs, higher living standards.

This progress was possible because political leaders expanded their horizons beyond simply speaking about the interests of the Constituent Peoples. Neighbouring countries were throwing off an obsolete mindset and embracing their Euro-Atlantic future, and when BiH leaders started to emulate this trend they got enthusiastic international support.

However, after taking two steps forward, the country took a step backwards. The politics of the past reappeared, and progress was put on hold.

We learned – and it has been a painful lesson – that while the Dayton system works well enough when applied in a constructive and cooperative way, it works very badly when applied in a destructive and confrontational way.

And when the system works badly, the people suffer.

So, in recent years we have seen employment opportunities dwindle and poverty increase, we have seen a fall in foreign investment and a rise in the number of young people who want to emigrate.

In both these phases – the phase of positive growth and the phase of depressing decline – the same constitution was in place. What changed was the prevailing attitude among BiH politicians.

Addressing the lack of progress

As the political environment has changed, the International Community has adjusted its strategy.

In the first years after the war, when much international effort went into supervising the basic and timely implementation of the peace agreement – military disengagement, refugee return, freedom of movement, and so on – the International Community took a hands-on approach. The OHR intervened on a daily basis to resolve disputes and maintain an environment in which a domestic political settlement could be consolidated.

When immediate post-war military issues had been settled and much of the physical reconstruction programme had been completed, emphasis shifted to making domestic political and administrative structures fully functional and self-sustaining.

In this phase, the BiH parties, including the parties that are in power today, cooperated to maintain an independent Central Bank which has provided Bosnia and Herzegovina with one of Southeast Europe's most stable currencies, created the BiH Armed Forces, units of which are now on international peacekeeping duties, and established a state-of-the-art indirect taxation system.

These are just three of the major achievements of this time.

When this pattern of progress had clearly been established, the International Community began handing over responsibility to the BiH authorities.

The results of this transfer have not been universally positive. Political infighting has exacerbated an economic downturn, and there has been a corresponding rise in crime and corruption.

The International Community has sought ways of addressing the lack of progress.

For example, the Office of the EU Special Representative was decoupled from the Office of the High Representative and the main thrust of the International Community's engagement was invested in an enhanced EU presence.

But progress has continued to be fitful.

We have seen a chronic inability or unwillingness on the part of the domestic authorities to implement even just the beginnings of the massive reform agenda that has to be completed before a country can become an EU member state.

Some argue that the system is entirely to blame. With all the checks and balances that were built into the structure of government at Dayton it's impossible to get any policy agreed never mind implemented.

While it is true that the Dayton structure provides significant blocking opportunities for those who do not want the system to work, there was a period, as I mentioned earlier, when BiH leaders were able to move the country forward under the Dayton system.

So of course, there are problems in the system and the four million people of this country would be better off if these problems were addressed, but the essential problem does not lie with Dayton it lies with the political leaders who won't make it work.

Fixing broken government

In recent months, citizens have come out onto the streets to express their anger with government inefficiency and corruption.

People from all walks of life and in every part of the country are demanding transparent and less wasteful government, and investment in jobs, education and public services.

They're not demanding a new constitution.

They're demanding that their leaders do the work they were elected to do.
They're not demanding protection for the Constituent Peoples.

They're demanding a better deal for all citizens.

Citizens are taking into their hands the job of fixing broken government.

Where politicians have failed to discharge the responsibilities that were given to them, citizens have stepped into the vacuum.

Where party representatives have failed to take ownership of the country's future – the people have stepped in to take ownership in their own right.

This is a long awaited development that could help to break the deadlock that has blocked progress for nearly two election cycles.

Ultimate democratic authority

I'm sometimes asked why I don't use the powers invested in my office to remove the politicians who obstruct good government and to enact the legislation that will turn the economy around and start curbing crime and corruption.

My response is that the BiH institutions already exist that can and must do this. My office works with BiH partners day in and day out to support key institutions and to persuade political representatives to do the same.

I believe this work will be all the more effective if it is backed up by citizens themselves. That is why I am so encouraged by the new assertiveness of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

They have been poorly served by their leaders for much too long. They have no reason to put up with this in silence.

Popular pressure has already delivered a small amount of change, and the plenums organised in various cities have set new standards of constructive and transparent political discourse.

I believe more can be done between now and the elections – and in October, of course, the people will have the opportunity once again to exercise the ultimate authority in a democratic society.

The people are demanding that their leaders make an imperfect system work. It has been made to work in the past and it can be made to work again. There is no doubt that the system can be improved through constitutional change – but in the meantime it has to be made to work.

There are too many jobless, too many homeless, too many families who do not know how they will put food on the

table or where they will find the money for utility bills – and this dire situation can be addressed quickly if politicians listen to the people. There is still time between now and October to enact legislation that will help to turn the economy around; there is still time to give effective support to the institutions that were put in place to tackle crime and corruption.

The new assertiveness of civil society gives us reason to hope that political leaders will not ignore the demands of their own constituents for very much longer.

Now, I would be happy to offer the floor to other points of view.