

New Year's Message from the High Representative Valentin Inzko: Real Progress Can Be Made in 2013

When it began, the year 2012 was a time of hope and opportunity for BiH. Indeed, some important progress was achieved. Laws important for your European future were passed, budgets were adopted, and great plans were set out.

Unfortunately, however, I suspect that many BiH citizens will look back on 2012 with dissatisfaction, at least politically speaking. To a significant degree, the past year was a period of missed opportunities that slowed this country down on the road to prosperity, security and full Euro-Atlantic integration.

As for 2013, I choose to be optimistic. The region is moving forward. Croatia will join the EU in 2013. Montenegro initiated negotiations for membership in the EU, and Serbia achieved candidate status. In 2013, opportunities will remain for BiH to move ahead in the same direction as its neighbors. The International Community will do everything in its power to help you take advantage of these opportunities.

For instance, in addition to your prospects for movement toward the EU, you have a standing offer related to NATO. There is no good reason now for not moving ahead.

We also hope your leaders will show the wisdom to end the stalemate in Mostar. OHR was closely involved this year in a concerted effort to end the administrative paralysis in Mostar and we will continue to work with all stakeholders to achieve a breakthrough. For this effort to succeed, the parties must

reach agreement on a fair compromise that benefits all the city's residents.

In the Federation, your leaders need to stop squabbling and instead focus on economic priorities and fighting crime and corruption, among other priorities.

In the RS, while the entity basically functioned well, some Banja Luka based politicians need to stop wasting time on anti-state initiatives that distract attention from other more pressing needs, such as creating jobs. As parties move to implement their new partnership agreements in 2013 they will need to preserve the reforms already achieved and honor their international commitments.

Clearly, there is work to be done in 2013. It will only be done successfully if the parties focus on resolving the problems that citizens face.

I believe real progress can be made in the coming year. The International Community is committed to helping the four million citizens of this country get the benefits they deserve from the opportunities that await them. Citizens don't want more rhetoric and more deadlock: they want constructive policies and practical solutions. I believe that, despite the disappointments of 2012, political leaders can deliver this in 2013.