

Opening Remarks by EUSR Valentin Inzko At a Session of Citizens for Europe On Solutions to Mass Unemployment in BiH



Implementing EU Policies Can Bring Higher Employment

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs a political breakthrough. I think all political leaders of this country would acknowledge this. The present politics of disagreement has delivered little in concrete terms to the average citizen, other than perhaps high unemployment and low living standards.

The purpose of the dialogue that is being developed by the Citizens for Europe initiative is to enable civil society to create conditions in which a breakthrough will be possible.

I am convinced that this initiative can succeed.

Constructive dialogue – and sensible action prompted by that dialogue – can help to tackle poverty and joblessness, crime and corruption, inadequate public services and low levels of investment. This has been the actual experience of EU countries.

Citizens for Europe can facilitate a dialogue that will

formulate and promote real solutions. And I am pleased to hear that some authorities are already taking these citizens' hard work into account and that, for instance, the Board for Agriculture of the House of Peoples of the FBiH Parliament is actually today discussing, as part of its official agenda, the Citizens for Europe recommendations on agriculture and rural development. In addition, during the Citizens for Europe public session on agriculture back in June, some state parliamentarians encouraged ministries to forward such recommendations to the parliaments for discussion.

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The serious purpose of this initiative is reflected in the sectors that have been addressed so far – energy and agriculture in previous sessions and in today's session it is employment.

BiH citizens – whether in the RS or in the Federation, whether in cities or towns or the smallest settlements – have a common aspiration to live in dignity. Citizens want work; they want decent wages and decent working conditions.

These things can be delivered through practical programmes that help to create jobs and in turn help to raise living standards.

Are such policies at the forefront of public debate in Bosnia and Herzegovina today?

No, they are not.

And that's a real problem in BiH politics.

The political parties need to be made aware that this is a problem.

Political posturing that does not put food on people's tables is just that – posturing.

And let me stress – poverty and unemployment are not the prerogative of one entity or one people: citizens all across Bosnia and Herzegovina are suffering.

The only way to reduce that suffering is to implement the kind of practical and coordinated economic reforms that we are here to discuss today.

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Many of these reforms are laid out in detail in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and in the European Partnership, and as such they have already been endorsed by BiH leaders.

Leaders have embraced these reforms but have been unable or unwilling to implement them.

This must change.

We have to help elected officials – in the municipalities, in the cantons, in the entities and at the state level – to do what they have promised they would do.

Leaders of the main parties have committed themselves to make it easier for workers to find employment in any part of the country – and that means integrating a fractured labour market. A BiH worker should be able to earn a living with the same ease in any part of Bosnia and Herzegovina – that is a basic civil right.

Party leaders have also committed themselves to establish a BiH Social and Economic Council that will bring workers and employers fully into the process of economic policymaking. This inclusiveness has been effective inside the European Union and there is no reason to believe that it won't be effective in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is precisely initiatives like these that will help to turn the economy around.

Public commitments by party leaders also include resolving the health-care and welfare issues that currently overburden the employment bureaux and make it hard for them to carry out their core task effectively – and their core task, let me remind you, is to help unemployed citizens find work.

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The Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the European Partnership cite these and other reforms because they have been successful in the EU and they can be successful in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

If Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to achieve EU membership and if the citizens of this country are to start enjoying EU standards of living – then, obviously, EU policies have to be implemented.

Any party leader who objects to this path should come out in the open and admit this preference publicly.

Until now, some politicians have quietly sabotaged reforms that would have made life better for citizens – including their own constituents. Perhaps they have a democratic right to do this, but there is no reason why they should be allowed to do it quietly.

If the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina want to make their leaders follow a more constructive and pragmatic path – a path to prosperity and security, and a path to Europe – they must make their aspirations clear and compelling.

That is what the Citizens for Europe initiative can help to do.

The proposals that will be presented and discussed today have been formulated through an informed and intensive drafting process that has included key civic stakeholders in the labour and employment sector from every part of Bosnia and

Herzegovina.

I urge the authorities present here today to listen to citizens' demands and understand their concerns, and to take these on board as a matter of urgency, so that Bosnia and Herzegovina may prosper in the long run.

Thank you