

# Bosnia and Herzegovina Can Still Catch Up



Bosnia and Herzegovina can catch up with its neighbours if BiH citizens are empowered to influence policy and if present opportunities to circumvent obstacles to European integration are seized, High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko said today.

“The first step towards reflecting the aspirations of citizens is to form a government,” the HR/EUSR told participants at a conference in Sarajevo organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies and the BiH Foreign Policy Initiative. “When a Council of Ministers is in place it will be possible to begin implementing urgent reforms.”

Noting that a clear lesson of previous EU enlargements is that “every citizen must be mobilised,” he said that this kind of mobilization for European integration has not yet been achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was a matter of urgency to “find effective ways of bringing citizens into the policymaking process.”

“For at least a generation, policymaking has been monopolised by a very small cadre of professional politicians,” he said. “When this group reaches agreement supporting the Stabilisation and Association Process, progress is made. We saw this in the case of visa liberalisation. When the same group disagrees – or when it reaches agreement on the basis of principles that are inimical to European values – progress comes to a halt.”

The HR/EUSR said much of the hardship being experienced by BiH citizens could have been avoided if misplaced objections to economic reforms had been challenged by “the voice of citizens”.

However, he insisted that “Bosnia and Herzegovina *can* succeed – and, with

the right approach, it will succeed. Until three or four years ago we saw glimpses of the kind of success that is possible. We have to return to the policies that generated that success and these are exactly the policies that are set out in the SAA and the European Partnership.”

The HR/EUSR said that establishing a reinforced EU presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina means that the EU will be able to work “even more responsively and effectively” and he said that “after a long period of political impasse and uncertainty the country is poised to make a fresh start.”

*The full text of the HR/EUSR’s speech can be accessed at [www.ohr.int](http://www.ohr.int) and [www.eusrbih.eu](http://www.eusrbih.eu)*