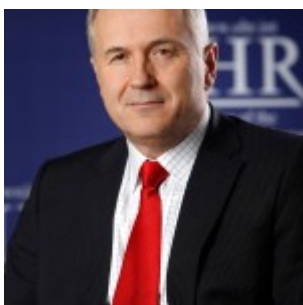


Remarks by HR and EUSR Valentin Inzko at a Conference Organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies and the BiH Foreign Policy Initiative on the Integration of Balkan Countries in the European Union by 2030



Bosnia and Herzegovina Can Still Catch Up

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I particularly wanted to participate in this conference because the main themes – including identity, civil society and the challenges of uneven economic development in the region – are crucial for taking the Western Balkans into the European Union, and also for resolving some of the major difficulties that Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently experiencing.

Each of these themes deserves a conference in itself, but let me touch on a small number of important points.

Engaging all stakeholders

To achieve the transformation required for EU membership, every citizen must be mobilised.

This is one of the clear lessons of previous enlargements.

However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina such mobilization has not yet been achieved.

In the first instance we will take a major step forward by acknowledging that this problem exists.

For at least a generation, policymaking in this country has been monopolised by a very small cadre of professional politicians.

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.

Clearly, we have to find – as a matter of urgency – effective ways of bringing citizens into the policymaking process. We must achieve the public mobilization that is essential in countries that want to join the European Union.

Bad arguments go unchallenged

On regional economic disparities I would argue that from the BiH perspective many of the difficulties we are experiencing are self-inflicted. A broad range of economic initiatives in the European Partnership and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement have been stopped because of a lack of institutional coordination or capacity, or because successful implementation depends on consensus at the state level, which has now been absent for a very long time.

Efforts to consolidate the single economic space, for example, in preparation for entry into the EU Single Market, have been undermined because of disagreements about the respective responsibilities of the Entities and the State.

Many of the objections do not stand up to economic or constitutional scrutiny, but in the absence of an authentic and effective citizens' voice, bad arguments go unchallenged.

The consequences of this have included high unemployment, rising poverty, collapsing investment, and moribund public services.

It is increasingly clear that the voice of citizens must be articulated as a necessary counterweight to the voice of the political elite.

Successful identity

Let me turn to the question of identity – not ethnic identity but country identity.

A country that is succeeding stands a better chance of winning and maintaining popular support than a country that is failing.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has succeeded to a greater degree than many would have believed possible in 1995.

It's important to remember this, especially when poorly informed commentators ignore or dismiss the achievements of the last fifteen years.

But it is equally true that Bosnia and Herzegovina has not succeeded as much as it could have done or as much as it can do.

It 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. Living standards were beginning to rise; new jobs were being created, public services were beginning to improve.

We have to return to the policies that generated that success.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are exactly the policies that are set out in the SAA and the European Partnership.

I would add that confidence in a country's success is tied to confidence in the entire region's success. Just as individual countries can exert a drag on regional progress, they can also act as a catalyst. A step forward in one country can be the beginning of a step forward in neighbouring countries.

Perhaps there is an expanded role here for the Regional Cooperation Council, which, as you know, has its headquarters in Sarajevo. Southeast Europe is potentially one of the fastest growing and most productive regions on the continent – and its international image should be developed in this positive context.

Empowering citizens

The establishment of a reinforced EU presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the appointment of Peter Sorensen, a diplomat with a thorough knowledge of politics and society in the Western Balkans, means that the EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina will now be configured in away that will allow it to work even more responsively and effectively.

After a long period of political impasse and uncertainty the country is poised to make a fresh start – and the International Community is ready to work with the citizens to make the most of the opportunities that now

exist.

The first step towards reflecting the aspirations of BiH citizens is to form a government. When a Council of Ministers is in place it will be possible to begin implementing urgent reforms, and this can be done with overwhelming domestic and international support.

This is about empowering BiH citizens so that they can move forward under their own steam. It is about seizing the opportunity to circumvent obstacles that have been placed in the way of European integration, and by doing this, helping Bosnia and Herzegovina catch up with its neighbours.

Thank you