

Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko At a Meeting of the European People's Party Panel on 'EU Responsibilities in Region'



An Opportunity We Must Not Miss

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe we are seeing a coalescence of opinion among policymakers – in Brussels, in EU member states and in the region – on how to make the EU's political and financial investment in Southeast Europe as effective and beneficial as possible.

At different stages and at different speeds – often with different degrees of enthusiasm and different levels of immediate success – governments have leveraged the Stabilisation and Association process and the accession process to overcome major obstacles.

In some countries this approach has been sufficient. Domestic stakeholders – whether in political parties or in civil

society – have had the capacity to take advantage of EU help and carry through necessary reforms. In Bosnia and Herzegovina – and in some other countries in the Western Balkans – the situation is different, and the EU needs to adapt its policies on the ground.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, because of specific historical and political circumstances, the Stabilisation and Association Process has not yet delivered the results we all want to see. Yes, Bosnia and Herzegovina has progressed on the EU agenda, but the fundamental political problems in the country remain the same. The EU has so far not been able to change this dynamic, and this is an issue which the EU needs to take seriously, as we do not want to import further problems into the European Union.

In this regard, I would like to make two key points this morning:

- first, the obstacles to progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina *can* be eliminated – however, we will need a different and more proactive approach from the EU if this is to happen. The standard Stabilisation and Association process will not work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We need a reinforced EU presence and policy, and the enhanced EU presence which is now being prepared can take a leading role in making sure that this happens.
- second, ending the stalemate in Bosnia and Herzegovina will help to unblock a logjam that is affecting the progress of the region as a whole.

In other words, we in the European Union are facing a particular challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, we also need the means to tackle this challenge.

And when we have overcome this challenge the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the people of Europe will be

beneficiaries.

A proactive and dynamic posture

A significant level of EU coordination has already been achieved on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the basic configuration – with the Office of the European Union Special Representative and the EU Delegation operating under complementary but separate mandates, and the EUSR double-hatted as the High Representative – has often tended to blur the focus and diminish the effectiveness of EU efforts.

With the new configuration that is now being discussed by the EU member states – with the EU delegation and the EUSR under one roof and under the same hat – I am sure we can achieve better focus and better results.

And with this we can bring a fresh approach to some deep-rooted problems.

This change creates a real prospect that after a long period of painfully slow progress, the Stabilisation and Association process in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be re-launched and made to work in a much more satisfactory way. The EU needs to consider what works best in complicated countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we should not just apply our standard policies which may have worked well elsewhere but which will not work in the Western Balkan context.

There are compelling reasons for the EU to adopt a proactive and dynamic posture.

Enormous progress has been made in different parts of the region, and places where special difficulties are being experienced should be addressed in a targeted way so that the region as a whole is not held back.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the reorganisation of EU resources

to reflect the aspirations of the Lisbon Treaty and the operational structure of the External Action Service will, by their very nature, help to make the EU presence more effective.

What we must *also* do is ensure that the streamlined office has tools that allow it to make a decisive contribution to ending the obstruction that has in recent years halted Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

I want to emphasise that a robust EU office does not mean that the EU will take on difficult tasks that BiH stakeholders ought to be tackling by themselves.

On the contrary, there is in Bosnia and Herzegovina a groundswell of popular energy and commitment that has been marginalised. There is mass support for EU integration, but this has not been channelled into political action – and in some cases popular pro-European sentiment has been actively discouraged by mainstream parties. A robust, proactive and targeted approach by the new EU office can help turn popular aspiration into political momentum, and this will have a major and positive impact on resolving the political stalemate.

A constructive partnership between the European Union and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a way forward.

The new EU office can act as a catalyst for progress, and this in turn will ease the integration trajectory of the Western Balkans as whole.

This is a practical and effective approach to removing obstacles. When this is done, the aspiration of the vast majority of BiH citizens and the strategic objective of the European Union can be brought substantially closer.

An effective and productive partnership

There are persuasive arguments for maintaining the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina in one form or another, at least in the short to medium term. This would mean that outstanding issues related to the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement could continue to be addressed by a dedicated office responsible to the Peace Implementation Council. The EU office, meanwhile, will be able to focus on a forward-looking – and forward-moving – agenda clearly and exclusively premised on progressive EU integration.

I believe this division of labour can be the basis for an effective and productive partnership. This would exactly be the flexible and tailor-made arrangement I believe the EU should look for in the Western Balkans.

The reconfiguration of EU assets in Bosnia and Herzegovina has come at a fortuitous moment. It is imperative that we take advantage of the opportunity this reconfiguration creates.

We may not have another opportunity as promising as this for some time to come.

Thank you