

Opening Speech by High Representative & EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko, At the Parliament for Europe Session On Evaluating BiH Progress toward the European Union



A More Resolute, Creative, Constructive and Mature Approach

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying what a pleasure it is to participate in the first session of the “Parliament for Europe” in 2011. In addition to the Chairman of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Presidency, Mr. Radmanovic, today’s gathering brings together representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia and parliamentarians from five newly elected assemblies in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Office of the European Union Special Representative

launched the “Parliament for Europe” initiative in 2009 and it has continued because it has proved to be a useful way of focusing parliamentary attention and capacity on the EU agenda.

I know that Nevenka Savic from the Directorate for European Integration and Boris Iarochévitch from the EU Delegation will speak in detail this afternoon about progress (or, perhaps I should more accurately say, *lack* of progress) in carrying forward the legislative agenda laid out in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. I believe they will provide us with a useful snapshot of where Bosnia and Herzegovina is and what it needs to do in 2011.

For my own part, I would like to examine the EU agenda in its domestic *political* context – because the success or failure of every effort, at every level of parliamentary activity, will be predicated on the overall political environment.

A long dry spell

The political environment is obviously a cause for serious concern. Political parties and leaders continue to have fundamental differences when it comes to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the way the country should be organised. This has led to a serious political stalemate in the past years. This is also why, almost five months after the general election, the country is still without a new government.

Here, I am obliged to speak bluntly – if the political elite cannot form a government how can it pilot this country into Europe? If it cannot form a government it cannot address the necessary reforms which are required for European integration and it cannot even meet the basic aspirations of its citizens.

However, while there has been continuous squabbling among the party leaders, there are no such views among the citizens of

Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have consistently made it clear that they want into the European Union – as soon as possible.

Yet elected politicians routinely express ambivalence about whether the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina should or should only under certain conditions move forward on the European road.

The results of this ambivalence have been damaging. While Bosnia and Herzegovina is still trying to resolve basic strategic and political uncertainties, the rest of the region is taking decisive steps towards the European Union. The citizens of this country deserve to enjoy the concrete benefits resulting from the integration process no less than their neighbours.

We have to face up to this disagreeable state of affairs – and it makes sense to face up to it in gatherings like this, where the participants can actually do something about fixing the problem.

You are uniquely qualified to begin the change that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs.

You have a democratic mandate. You have been elected.

Party discipline is a powerful thing, in EU member states just as much as in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

But *parliamentary* responsibility and accountability to citizens is no less powerful, and so is the responsibility of individual MPs who put their obligation to their constituents above any other political consideration.

Immediate priorities

Clearly, the priority now is to form a government, and for this to be done we will have to see a more resolute, creative,

constructive and mature approach by party leaders. What we also need to see are politicians with more confidence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As quickly as possible after the government is formed Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to focus on delivering on issues that will allow the submission of a credible application for EU candidate status, first and foremost bringing about constitutional change that will align the constitution with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Commissioner Füle's speech, Bosnia and Herzegovina will also need to address the state-level state aid and census laws if the country is to progress towards the EU.

Further steps have also to be taken to make the country more functional – this is a clear requirement of EU integration. I should make it clear that this is not about centralisation, it's about functionality and efficiency. BiH needs to have the necessary structures and institutions to deal with the European integration challenges – once again this is not about centralisation but efficiency. The need for efficiency has never been greater – it will also deliver economic reforms that are desperately needed in order to reverse the economic decline of recent years.

Throughout this process, the parliamentarians of Bosnia and Herzegovina can count on the support of the European Union. In this respect I want to highlight the European Union's readiness to reinforce its engagement in this country and enhance its role, structure and effectiveness.

No more politics as usual

Despite the protracted problems in the country I remain an optimist. Bosnia and Herzegovina will become a member of the

European Union – and I believe that this country has the human and natural resources to make a significant and distinctive contribution to European society.

But for this to happen you simply cannot continue with politics as usual.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina politics as usual would mean failure as usual.

We need a serious, constructive, realistic, and determined approach that is not led by cynicism but by an honest desire to help the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina out of the predicament in which they have been placed by years of political failure.

And I know that such an approach is not only necessary: it is possible.

Thank you