

First-Time Voters Can Revolutionize the Political Landscape



In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the seats in the parliaments are often decided by a very small number of votes. Referring to this fact, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Valentin Inzko, said yesterday that the 80,000 young people who will be eligible to vote for the first time on 3 October can revolutionize the political landscape in this country.

He said young people must “demand that politicians explain during the campaign how they will tackle youth unemployment and how they will improve the education system.”

He said that in contrast to the rhetoric of the main parties, “young people want concrete answers to concrete questions,” and he noted that travelling throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past year meeting thousands of citizens he had “not once encountered young people expressing support for the ethno-nationalism that we are witnessing in the election campaign”.

Speaking to youth activists in Travnik, the HR/EUSR said the failure by the authorities to secure recognition for BiH diplomas in the European Union, the absence of jobs for young people, and continuing widespread corruption in the education sector would all influence how young people vote on 3 October.

“The elections offer a chance to begin to change this,” he said, “and clearly the situation *must* change because it is a disaster for young people in this country.”

He cited the latest employment figures, which show that more than 57 percent of the BiH workforce under the age of 25 are jobless, and more than a third of young workers who have been able to secure some sort of employment are working informally – in other words on low salaries, with no job security and without social protection.

“This is unacceptable,” the HR/EUSR said. “Young people must demand a debate about concrete programmes and the steps that parties will take to attract investment, bring down unemployment and end the system where jobs are allocated on the basis of personal contacts or party affiliation instead of knowledge or skill.”

He said he was surprised that “politicians do not seem to be alarmed by the present situation,” and he stressed that the election offers a chance for BiH young people to tell politicians “to live up to their responsibilities.”

“The Council of Ministers has still not adopted a framework law on youth,” the HR/EUSR said. “Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a social inclusion strategy or a development strategy, and the lack of these policies is negatively affecting young people.”

He emphasised that “things will not change by themselves,” and that “complaining will solve nothing. More young people need to get involved. You need to demand the progress you want to see from your politicians – and election day offers an opportunity to do precisely this. Those who vote will decide who governs for the next four years. If you don’t vote, you will simply allow others to decide your future for you.”