

Path to Europe Still Open - But Political Focus Must Change

Until now, because of domestic political circumstances, Bosnia and Herzegovina has not been able to take full advantage of the opportunities raised by the improving regional climate – but this can change, High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko told an international conference in Austria today.

The HR/EUSR said that in recent years, just when it seemed possible to begin normalising the international engagement in the country, “a new political configuration emerged which produced deadlock and inability, or unwillingness by BiH leaders and parliamentarians to fulfil the conditions that had been laid down for OHR’s closure.”

He described “a damaging retreat” from the pragmatic consensus that delivered steady economic growth and rising living standards after 2000. “Instead, the last two years have been characterised by a sharp spike in unemployment throughout the country, together with growing public unease about crime – and political and parliamentary gridlock have prevented a coherent or effective response to these problems.”

However, the HR/EUSR emphasised that the political shortcomings that have produced the crisis can be fixed.

He warned that BiH politicians have dishonestly suggested to voters that they can one day enjoy all the social, political, travel, employment and welfare benefits of citizens in other parts of Europe – but without reforming Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to make it a normal, modern European state.

“This is a dangerous and damaging political sleight of hand and it must be exposed,” he said.

“When the BiH leadership resumes its focus on implementing the reforms that will deliver the Euro-Atlantic integration that most BiH citizens want, it will be possible to close the OHR and normalise the international community’s engagement in the country. At the same time it will be possible to get Bosnia and Herzegovina back onto the high road – already being taken by its neighbours – to prosperity and stability,” the HR/EUSR said.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a credible candidate for Euro-Atlantic integration. It can benefit from the regional environment and the European Union can help it to do this,” he concluded. “Bosnia and Herzegovina can return to the path that leads to prosperity and stability. That road remains open – it is marked out in the detailed provisions of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.”

The full text of the HR/EUSR’s speech to the Alpbach Europeann Foruum can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.eu