

They Are Stealing from You

Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be tackled if citizens make it an election issue and if they support those institutions that have shown a credible determination to do something about the problem, High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko wrote in a column that appeared in today's issue of Nezavisne Novine.

"Corruption is costing tens of thousands of jobs because prospective investors will not put their money in a country where graft is so deeply embedded in the administrative and political system," the HR/EUSR wrote.

"Corruption is eating into the fabric of daily life in every part of Bosnia and Herzegovina – when doctors refuse to treat patients until a gift has been given, when students pay money to pass exams, when building permits are granted only after a modest consideration for the planning official."

He added that "if we are going to go after the petty officials who take small bribes, let's also go after the political bigwigs who embezzle millions. The fact is that too many politicians and responsible officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina are stealing and getting away with it. Those who are doing so are stealing from you."

"The BiH Public Prosecutor's Office and the State Court have started putting officials on trial for corruption. It won't come as a surprise to anyone that the Prosecution and the Court have simultaneously become objects of intense political criticism," the HR/EUSR wrote.

"But the encouraging truth is that, despite criticism and political pressure, judicial authorities at various levels have started to tackle corruption. They need popular support to continue this fight and they need the vocal and practical support of any politician who is really serious about cleaning up public life."

The HR/EUSR stressed that "It is simply not true that corruption cannot be stopped," and he pointed out that "the laws and the institutions are in place – but they will only make a difference if the focus and approach of the political elite is fundamentally and decisively changed."

He said this change can be achieved by the electorate.

"On 3 October voters will have a golden opportunity to express their opinion about this grand theft. If citizens channel their anger into political action, it will be possible to start attracting substantial investment to Bosnia and Herzegovina, creating jobs and reducing poverty. This is why, as a priority, we must make corruption an election issue."

The full text of the HR/EUSR's op-ed can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.eu