



Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko At a ceremony to honour notable “Friends of Europe” in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Election Campaign Is an Opportunity to End the Deadlock

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me say what a pleasure it is to be here with you on this sunny spring morning in Bihac.

It is a particular pleasure because we are here to honour BiH citizens who have proved themselves to be notable “Friends of Europe” – individuals who have made a distinctive contribution to moving Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to full membership of the European Union.

This is a project that has the wholehearted support of the mass of BiH citizens. We have heard it already from CoM Chair Spiric. And that means that the “Friends of Europe” who are honoured here today for bringing the aspiration of millions of BiH citizens closer to fulfilment are also friends of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I’d like to make two brief points that I believe are very relevant to this event – and very relevant to the country as a whole and the circumstances in which it now finds itself.

The first is related to the unpleasant but unarguable fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina’s European path is stalled in some way.

Necessary legislation has been buried, lost, held up or simply rejected in parliament – not because of the legislation itself but because sections of the parliamentarians appear to regard any law that is enacted in the State Parliament as some sort of defeat.

This is lamentable – but I am not here this morning to lead a general lament.

Instead, I want to examine a positive – and realistic – scenario. It is this: Far from intensifying the political gridlock, the election campaign can actually begin to resolve the impasse.

This can happen if the impasse itself becomes a big part of the election debate.

The first question that every candidate and every party should be asked is this:

What have you done in the parliament to pass laws that move Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to Europe?

And the question can also be put another way.

What have you or your party done to obstruct these laws?

No one should be under any illusions – the reforms that will help this country aren't obstructing themselves.

People are often actively obstructing them.

The election campaign is an opportunity for citizens, the media, and other politicians to demand an explanation.

The second point I want to make this morning is this: the absence of progress on implementing the EU integration agenda has been accompanied by a sudden and steep rise in poverty and unemployment.

And this is not a coincidence.

The reforms that will attract investment and encourage companies to start operations here and create new jobs are the same reforms that have been sacrificed because of political obstruction.

Elections are about choice. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have a choice.

They can choose parliamentarians who have a record of getting things done or parliamentarians who have a record of stopping things from being done.

This is a real choice because both groups exist at both local and cantonal level. It is easier at local level. Anybody can approach mayor to ask him why certain road has not been finished. It is not that easy at higher levels of power.

I do not make blanket criticisms of all the politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially not those who are not present here. That is not my intention. The fact is that there is a fund of energy and goodwill in the political establishment here – but it has been sidelined in recent years.

There are politicians who really want to eliminate the roadblocks, but they have been sidelined, too.

This year's election campaign is an opportunity for these people to go out and make their case – the case for getting things done.

This campaign is crucially important because four million citizens cannot simply be consigned to four more years of poverty and political standstill.

EU integration reforms are not only necessary – they are urgent. Opportunities exist here in Krajina. Your people are capable. Real reforms should be implemented in order enable them to show their expertise.

This election must be about choosing people who are going to focus on these reforms. The choice is yours. You will choose on 3 October, you have Bonn Powers – use them!

Thank you.