

Citizens Must Reject Another Year of Hardship



Obstacles on Bosnia and Herzegovina's path to Europe can be removed before October, the High Representative and EU Special Representative told a conference today.

"I do not accept, and I do not believe anyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina should accept that nothing can be done in 2010 because there is an election," the HR/EUSR said. "Some people do not seem to understand that we cannot simply sit back and watch citizens being made to endure another year of economic catastrophe and rising poverty."

Inzko said "leaders who show that they can act effectively to address the causes of Bosnia and Herzegovina's misery will *win* votes not lose them."

The HR/EUSR dismissed suggestions that enlargement fatigue inside the EU has prompted Brussels to apply stricter criteria where Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned.

Noting that the EU has remained committed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership for a decade, and that it is backing up its political support with financial aid worth almost 400 million Euros over the next two years, Inzko said the reforms laid out in the European Partnership and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement are not arbitrary but "are steps that have brought stability and prosperity to the EU, and have delivered rapid improvements in living standards among new member states."

The HR/EUSR said the reform process “has been brought to a dead stop” because the political elite ignores the needs of most citizens.

“Perhaps the single most astonishing thing about the present crisis is that politicians seem to carry on doing business with complete indifference to the disasters that surround them. In 2009, 70,000 jobs were lost, yet the parties still refuse to enact legislation that would create jobs. Young people are forced to study at underfunded schools and corrupt universities, yet the parties still refuse to enact legislation that would help bring BiH education up to European standards. Hundreds of thousands of citizens go without adequate healthcare and eke out a living on a few hundred marks a month, yet the parties still refuse to adjust budget allocations so that those in greatest need will receive at least some of the assistance to which they are entitled.”

He said the only way to end “this disastrous insensitivity to other people’s pain” was to “make politicians pay a price for failure.”

“We need ten or twenty or thirty examples of the political will that materialized under the pressure of people’s strong demand as in the case of visa-liberalisation,” he said. “What about the reforms that will attract investment and create jobs; the ones that will refurbish the education system and the health system and the pension system and the physical infrastructure? If the political class is seriously planning to go to the electorate in October having done nothing about these issues for four years, then they should be made to pay a price.”

The HR/EUSR was speaking at a conference on EU integration organised by the Centre for Policy and Governance and the Heinrich Boll Foundation at Sarajevo University.

The full text of the HR/EUSR’s speech can be accessed at

www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.eu