

Thirty-two Weeks to Implement an Agenda that Matters

Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress towards NATO and the European Union is at a standstill, the High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko said today, noting that "it has been stopped by political leaders who have failed to enact or implement reforms to which they previously committed themselves."

Speaking to graduate students at the Political Science Faculty of Sarajevo University, the HR/EUSR said the priority now is to get the country "back onto the high road to Euro-Atlantic integration," which, he emphasised, "also means enacting and implementing long-delayed economic reforms that will help reverse the spread of poverty."

The HR/EUSR reiterated a point made in Sarajevo by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, that "it isn't for politicians here to decide how much European integration they will grant citizens. Citizens have made it clear that this is what they want and it's up to the politicians to deliver."

He said the international community supports "alternative politics" that will alter the way of doing business and "make it possible to change the constitution and get the country back on track for integration and recovery."

"There is an agenda for delivering security and prosperity to the people of this country - it is the Euro-Atlantic integration agenda," the HR/EUSR said. "It's about modernizing the armed forces so they can operate as a functioning and valued component of the world's leading military alliance; it's about modernizing the police service so as to end the tyranny of organized crime and corruption; it's about modernizing the business environment to attract investment and create jobs; it's about modernizing the health system and the education system; it's about modernizing the way citizens' rights and aspirations are protected and promoted."

He said the political parties must be made to explain what they are doing to take the country into NATO and the EU.

The HR/EUSR warned that the current financial crisis, mainly but not exclusively in the Federation, must not be turned into a political football.

"It must not be used for electioneering - its importance goes beyond that," he said. "It affects the stability of the country as a whole and the well-being of citizens."

The HR/EUSR stressed that technical, financial and political support for Bosnia and Herzegovina is available "but can be provided only if the country clearly demonstrates its commitment to reform. The current system is financially unsustainable, economically inefficient and socially unfair. This must change!"

"The clock is ticking," he said. "The elections are only 32 weeks away. Thirty-two weeks to get this country back onto the road to Euro-Atlantic integration and economic recovery. If the parties in power cannot do that - they can be removed by the electorate."

The HR/EUSR said the international community is committed to supporting necessary change. "The question now is this: Will the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina make this change happen? Because it is in their power to do that."

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