

Democracies Don't Work on Automatic Pilot



Politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina must not be allowed to make elections less democratic, High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko said today. He also stressed that “any attempt to exert influence or control over the BiH Central Election Commission must be resisted vigorously.”

The HR/EUSR said that instead of changing the policies that have caused the current economic crisis, some political parties have proposed changes that would have removed liberal provisions from the election law and would have reasserted the control of political parties.

“This would have widened the gap between citizens and their representatives,” the HR/EUSR said. “The fact that the proposals were rejected is positive – but citizens must remain vigilant and reject any future attempt by political parties to change the system in order to suit themselves.”

The HR/EUSR said that many in the BiH political establishment have failed to make the psychological shift to living and operating in a democracy. “They have not yet grasped that they do not have a natural right to exercise power, let alone a natural right to hold onto power.

Power has been given to them for a trial period by the electorate.”

The HR/EUSR said that an efficient and fully independent Central Election Commission “is the guarantee that what has been given can be taken away,” and that for this reason “it is crucial that the CEC remains completely and transparently independent of political influence or control.”

The HR/EUSR pointed out that parties can stay in power “not by changing the electoral system but by enacting legislation and implementing policies that will end the economic crisis and get Bosnia and Herzegovina back on the road to Europe.”

“Democracies don’t work on automatic pilot,” he said. “They need to be protected and upheld through the determined and active support of citizens.

He said democratic transition “goes beyond writing constitutions and enacting laws. It requires a shift in the way that people understand the right to acquire and exercise power. This change in thinking is not yet complete in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And because it is incomplete, democracy in this country remains at risk.”

He concluded that, as in other democracies, in Bosnia and Herzegovina “the election system is not the problem: the problem is the people who get elected – and every four years citizens have an opportunity to fix that.”

The HR/EUSR was addressing a conference organized in Sarajevo by the BiH Election Commission to mark International Election Day.

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