

Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko, to the Rotary Club of BiH



Citizens Have the Option of Electing New Leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Intensive consultations are underway to try and steer Bosnia and Herzegovina out of the political crisis that has now blocked progress for almost three years. At the end of last week I held talks in Brussels with the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, and on Thursday I will meet Steering Board political directors of the European Union countries in Madrid.

A great deal hangs in the balance – basically, whether the political stalemate can be ended and the country put back on the road to recovery.

But I wanted to keep my appointment today with members of the Rotary Club today, even in the midst of this crucial period of negotiations, because the people in this room play a key role in two important strands of public life in Bosnia and

Herzegovina and those strands have a bearing on the success or failure of politics in this country as a whole.

- As members of the business community you are directly involved in efforts to turn the BiH economy around; and
- As members of the Rotary Club you are directly involved in efforts to bring practical assistance to the least fortunate of your fellow citizens.

Kick-starting the political process is a matter of extreme urgency because when this is accomplished, we will be able to make exponential progress in these two areas – turning the economy around and helping the least fortunate in BiH society.

This twin objective is at the very core of the effort to get Bosnia and Herzegovina out of the present crisis.

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The lamentable state of the economy is now painfully clear.

In 2009, more than 70,000 jobs were lost; GDP shrank by three percent; imports and exports fell; and average monthly salaries – for those who were not made redundant – stagnated.

Many of the things that have *not* been done in the last twelve months.

- A 21st century legal code that would encourage investment and create jobs has not been introduced;
- the banking supervision system has *not* been modernized so as to get more money to small businesses;
- a Social and Economic Council to resolve problems in industry and boost economic growth has *not* been established.

The ruling parties promised to do all these things as part of

the European integration process. Voters should ask why – when jobs are evaporating and poverty stalks the land – they have *not* done what they said they would do.

Some people say that nothing can be done in 2010 as it is an election year.

That's absurd!

A great deal can be done in 2010 because it is an election year.

While BiH citizens – from every community and from every part of the country – have experienced increasing hardship they have watched neighbouring countries make steady progress towards complete EU integration.

Why is this so?

Voters should ask those seeking their vote in October.

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Again and again we hear calls for the International Community to intervene and force the political establishment to enact the legislation that will help end the misery of unemployment and poverty.

And with the same repetitive clamour we hear calls for the International Community to stand aside and leave the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to their fate.

But these are not the only two alternatives – and it is precisely because of this that I am here today to speak to you. There is a *via media* – the one that is practised in the rest of the world, the one that is practised by Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbours (who are now making rapid progress

towards EU membership while this country is not).

In this *via media* it isn't up to the International Community to solve the country's problems; it is up to the people.

Notice, I say the people, not necessarily the politicians.

If political leaders can't do the job, the people have the option of electing new leaders.

I have made this point many times. Indeed, my predecessors have made this point many times. I will continue to make it – because it is true.

I believe it is already well understood by members of the Rotary Club. You know that if you want to get things done you have to become directly involved. By becoming directly involved, you have been able to make a positive difference to the lives of thousands of your fellow citizens. This humanitarian involvement is both commendable and effective. Those skills give the business community a powerful political voice.

I hope that we will hear that voice in the months leading up to the general election.

And I hope that in this the business community will be emulated by other groups of citizens – students, trade unionists, consumer activists, employers and many more.

The election results will reflect the will of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is in the power of citizens to force an end to the present political deadlock.

It is in the power of citizens to make parliamentarians enact

the legislation they have promised to enact as part of the European integration process – before the October elections.

And it is in the power of citizens to ensure that the four years from 2010 to 2014 are significantly more productive than the period since 2006 has been.

We will do everything possible through diplomacy and persuasion to get the party leaders to end the stalemate – but it is essential that citizens do everything in their power to achieve the same result.

Business groups and other activists can lead the way.

Thank you