

# Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko At the European Forum Alpbach



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## Bosnia and Herzegovina: Revolution from Inside, Diplomatic Support from EU

Ladies and gentlemen,

Perhaps the most effective way of placing 1989 in perspective is to recall – and this requires a good deal of imagination – what Europe was like in 1988. All of us can remember the euphoria that was experienced when the peoples of Central Europe threw off their chains. But it is easy to forget that until the final weeks of the old regimes it was not clear to anyone that radical change was really going to happen. With hindsight it seems inevitable, but there was nothing inevitable about it at the time.

For the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina today, the prospect of full reintegration in Europe sometimes seems painfully distant. They may be inclined to think they are living in a

period akin to 1988. Positive developments seem neither inevitable nor imminent. And the further away the prospect of positive change appears, the less effective that prospect is as a spur for necessary political, economic and social reforms.

The regimes of the old communist block were toppled when the righteous indignation of the people was transformed into a political shock that in its final stages took the form of giant street protests. It involved church groups, trade unions, radical and moderate reformers, dissidents and tens of thousands of citizens who had never before been politically active.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina today, NGOs, trade unions and other groups are flexing their muscles. There is a growing popular conviction that corruption, political gridlock and chronic poverty are untenable. I believe that this conviction can be turned into focused political action, and that this is the key to necessary change – because change in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2009, like change in Central Europe in 1989, must come from the inside.

In 1989 politicians and diplomats were slow to understand the nature of the change that was taking place. The West Europeans acted with caution and, in the beginning, with a distinct lack of imagination and flexibility. In many respects, the peoples of Central Europe had dramatically completed their own liberation before the governments of Western Europe recognized what had happened.

Something similar may be occurring today in regard to the Western Balkans. The prevailing mindset in European capitals and in much of the European Union often tends to see this part of the continent as a challenge rather than an opportunity.

Yet Southeast Europe has the capacity to introduce a new and positive dynamic to the European Union, culturally,

politically and economically.

Let me remind you – had the countries of Central Europe been described in terms like that in 1988 the description would have been met with disbelief.

*That* is the lesson of 1989.

On the twentieth anniversary of the year of revolutions I believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina can – and must – experience a comparable revolution. For this to happen, citizens must channel their entirely legitimate dissatisfaction into effective political protest, and diplomats and politicians in the rest of the continent must recognize what is happening and support the process in timely and imaginative ways.

Thank you