

Article by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch "BiH has to implement reforms without delay"

It is BiH Citizens who are paying the price for shortsighted political calculations - Partnership cannot be a one-way process, it depends on responsible and professional authorities

Nearly a year after the last general elections and one year ahead of the next, Bosnia and Herzegovina has provided for its own Election Law, pushing the door to the Council of Europe wide open. The next elections will be the first organized by BiH itself and not by the International Community. If Yes, if. If the necessary institutions are set up and if the necessary by-laws are passed. Not a small task, considering the tight timeframe. Then, the country will be on the road to Europe. Just.

We are approaching a new benchmark. A lot has started to move since I announced the establishment of a Consultative Partnership Forum based on the concept of ownership. Last week, I chaired a joint working meeting of the Steering Board of the countries leading the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with top BiH Government and Entity representatives. This is an indicator of the new spirit of partnership between the International Community and the people of BiH. It is obvious that a successful BiH will be a country where the politicians and the citizens take the fate of the country into their own hands.

However, partnership cannot be a one-way street. It means responsible, professional governance. It means taking the required decisive and concrete steps towards structural economic reform. These steps might be unpopular, but they are indispensable. Commitment and responsibility for the future of the people of this country are indispensable elements in the partnership process. And there is a lot at stake. People long for jobs and a functioning system of public services. The younger, well-educated generation is increasingly searching for a future abroad, because they do not see any in BiH.

Confronted by a worsening economic situation – only recently, economic growth rates have had to be re-evaluated downwards – overcoming the hurdles that restrict development is paramount. BiH needs foreign investment urgently. Lack of reform will scare away foreign investors. As will the lack of modern institutions – such as a professional, self-confident civil service, and an independent judiciary, and media free of political control. Short of that, investors will simply go elsewhere in the region. It is up to BiH to convince investors of the commercial potential of this country.

It is the citizens of BiH, who pay the price for short-sighted political calculations, from the blockage of laws in the drafting process or in the Parliamentary Assembly to an unwillingness to take correct but tough decisions now. And eventually the politicians themselves, for whom there is only one way to win the support of the people – responsible, forward-looking leadership – will suffer.

The only way forward is reform. Now.

The International Community will be here to support BiH institutions in their efforts to achieve stability and self-sustainability. In this context there is a need not only for responsible governance but also for a total, immediate, and professional commitment to implementing, long-term, institutional, legal, and economic reforms as a prerequisite of full ownership and integration into EU structures. I will continue to stand ready to support professional and responsible action by the government, leading BiH into Europe.