

Elected Officials of BiH Must Live up to Their Responsibilities

Statement by High Representative Valentin Inzko:

“I met today with Steering Board Ambassadors in Sarajevo, as I promised to protestors in front of the BiH Parliament in the night between Thursday and Friday. A prominent theme of the discussion was the ongoing failure of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to adopt a lasting solution to the JMB issue and the strong public reaction to that failure.

The Steering Board joined me in placing full responsibility for resolving this issue with local authorities. The Steering Board did not want to free the BiH elected officials from their responsibility. The BiH Parliamentary Assembly must implement the ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court, a Dayton obligation, by adopting as soon as possible a lasting solution that maintains a single State-wide system.

Having spoken to the demonstrators personally on Thursday evening, as well as with many citizens around the country, it is abundantly clear to me that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the failure of politics in the country to meet citizens' most basic needs – in this case the right of new born citizens. The demonstrations we have seen in recent days across Bosnia and Herzegovina should be a wake up call for the political class as a whole and individual politicians regardless of party affiliation. The time has come for them to fundamentally change their approach to politics and to deliver the results that will take the country forward.

Let me also say that attempts to portray the events on Thursday as ethnically motivated are completely wide of the

mark and missing the central point of the general dissatisfaction of citizens everywhere in BiH. Some politicians may be tempted to use the situation as a fresh excuse not to turn up to work and to avoid taking the decisions they are paid to take. This would be a serious misjudgment of the mood in the country. Attendance at sessions of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a choice for elected politicians, who are well paid to do their jobs, but rather an obligation to the voters who elected them.

The right of citizens to demonstrate and freedom of expression are basic rights. Democracy does not just mean voting every four years. Peaceful protests are legitimate and normal, as long as they are conducted in accordance with the law and in a way that does not infringe the rights of others or disrupts the work of institutions. Moreover, exercising the right to peaceful protests is in no way bad for the image of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Quite the contrary: an active citizenry that is ready to hold government to account is central to a functioning democracy that works in the interests of its citizens. I commend those citizens throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina who have in recent days in a peaceful and dignified manner demanded positive change that is in the interests of all."