

Op-ed by the EU Special Representative and High Representative in BiH, Valentin Inzko: “Twenty-Seven Architects: One Desirable Residence”

Yesterday we celebrated Europe Day in the magnificent hall of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina . This event marked another anniversary of the most successful peace-building project in the history of our continent.

The European house is still being built; the work has gone on for more than fifty years and there are currently 27 architects – quite amazing then when you consider that the house is such a desirable residence.

But it is. It has been a phenomenally successful project, despite all the difficulties.

I would not have accepted the position of High Representative and EU Special Representative if I did not believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the capacity to move closer to the European Union and eventually to become a member.

I believe that it can be done and I believe it is the only real option for giving the people of this country greater personal security, higher living standards and a better quality of life.

Delivering these benefits is the underlying object of the

reforms mapped out in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the European Partnership – reforms which the authorities here are now legally bound to implement.

I recently visited Serbia and Croatia and I was struck by the sense of purpose I witnessed among the political leadership in both countries.

They have seen their European future – and they are doing everything possible to make sure it doesn't pass them by.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs the same sense of purpose.

Until now, that sense of purpose has been conspicuously absent.

There are some politicians who like to say what they will *not* do in order to get Bosnia and Herzegovina into Europe.

Paradoxically, in many cases no one is actually asking them to do the things they say they're determined not to do.

Their confusion would be comical if it weren't so potentially damaging.

To join Europe, people in this country are not being asked to give anything up. Rather, they are being asked to embrace ways of acting and ways of thinking that are new.

Some people find that a challenge.

I intend to do everything in my power as High Representative and EU Special Representative to help people meet that challenge.

Politicians in neighbouring countries have succeeded; politicians in this country can too.

This week we are celebrating Europe Day – a good opportunity to call for a new way of thinking.

The vast majority of all the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina want the benefits of European integration – starting with visa-free travel to the rest of the continent.

I do not believe there is much patience for leaders who would hold up these benefits on the grounds that they are resolutely determined not to make sacrifices that no one is asking them to make.

It has been said before, but it bears saying again: European integration does not mean that Serbs, Croats or Bosniaks will lose their identity, or even a little part of their identity.

That hasn't happened to the Germans or the French or the Walloons or Flemings or Bavarians, or indeed to the people of Carinthia, where I come from.

The European Union has delivered all of the benefits of pooling resources and at the same time set in place safeguards for the distinctive communities that make up its 500-million strong population.

This isn't something BiH citizens have to swallow like a bitter pill – it's a tried and tested formula for prosperity and security.

The 27 architects are building a pretty comfortable house and they're doing it through dialogue and compromise. That's what Bosnia and Herzegovina needs and that's what I will support during my mandate here.

Valentin Inzko is the international community's High Representative and the European Union's Special Representative

in Bosnia and Herzegovina.