Op-ed by Valentin Inzko: A Dynamic and Effective OHR

By Valentin Inzko,

In recent years, the International Community has resisted popular demands to intervene in disputes and solve problems that BiH politicians are not solving themselves by adopting and implementing much needed reforms, including those required for EU membership.

This refusal to do the job of the elected officials of this country has been difficult but necessary.

The OHR no longer intervenes in day-to-day politics – but it does work in a constructive and open manner to help BiH political leaders resolve their differences and to help BiH citizens achieve their aspirations.

Instead of seizing this opportunity and making progress on issues related to the accession of the country to the European Union or on other issues that matter to the citizens, the last five years have shown the politicians prefer engaging in fruitless disputes concerning the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

As a result of this, living standards have continued to fall. Thousands of jobs and tens of millions of Euros in aid and investment have been lost

Political disagreements on the most fundamental questions of

the state that have continued for the past five years without any sign of resolution have made it clear that the mandate of the High Representative remains essential if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to safeguard completion of its recovery.

The separation of the OHR and the EUSR – which will formally be completed on 1 September – is designed to increase the effectiveness of the partnership that exists between the International Community and the citizens and leaders of this country.

The move will strengthen the EU's capacity to increase its activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time it will allow the High Representative to focus on his core tasks, not least insuring that the Agreement on Civilian Implementation of the Peace Settlement is fully respected. However, the separation of the OHR and the EUSR also means that coordination of their support for Bosnia and Herzegovina will be closer than ever. Both share the goal of making Bosnia and Herzegovina a functional state and securing peace for its citizens.

OHR's role is to maintain an environment where the civilian aspects of the Peace Accords are being respected, an environment in which BiH politicians can do the work they were elected to do. No matter where challenges come from, citizens can rest assured that the High Representative, for the time being, remains in place to address those challenges.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a protectorate but a sovereign state that, for clear historical reasons, provides for an international official with a strong mandate to resolve differences and conflicts on fundamental state issues and to ensure the Agreement on Civilian Implementation of the Peace Settlement is respected. Until challenges to the Dayton Peace Accords and to the basic structures of the State cease, the High Representative will continue to play this role.

We are moving forward into what will be a challenging period. The underlying causes of political failure will have to be addressed and resolved. It is time for parties to look forwards and not backwards to kick start a political dialogue that delivers healthy compromises and most importantly concrete results in the interests of the citizens of this country. The OHR will therefore operate in a dynamic and effective way to foster an environment in which difficult political discussions can be undertaken and brought to a successful conclusion.

OHR is not going to solve Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems, by doing the job of local politicians – one way or another the political leaders will have to do that. Their obligation will not go away and, as every day passes by, that obligation will become an ever heavier burden.

As institutions in the country return to work after the summer break, political leaders have an opportunity to get back to a political process that fully respects the Dayton Peace Accords, a political process based on real dialogue and compromise that delivers reforms and takes the country forward.

This is a process that both the HR and the EU want to support. This is what we expect from political leaders..

Valentin Inzko is the International Community's High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina.