Op-ed by Valentin Inzko, EU Special Representative and High Representative in BiH: “A realistic plan of action”

If you want Bosnia and Herzegovina to change for the better, then exercise your democratic right on polling day. Only the citizens who vote – not the ones who stay at home – will decide who governs for the next four years.
To make an informed decision we need informed debate, and the only way we can have informed debate is if candidates actually address voters’ concerns in a constructive campaign environment.

Since I became High Representative and EU Special Representative I have travelled the length and breadth of the country to meet not just political representatives but citizens. In town-hall debates focused on issues people really care about the priorities of citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina very quickly became clear to me. I do not see why these issues should surprise anyone – they should certainly not surprise party leaders – but I nevertheless wish to mention them here since until now they have not been at the centre of the election debate.

Citizens care about the tens of thousands of jobs that have been lost in the last year. They want the authorities to take

all necessary steps – and to take these steps quickly – to secure investment in new jobs. Currently, those jobs are going to neighbouring countries because Bosnia and Herzegovina has not developed its internal market in preparation for entry to the single market of the European Union.

Citizens care about political and administrative corruption and they want the authorities to live up to their promises – which means implementing anti-corruption reforms that are part of the EU integration process.

Citizens care about the social services which are too often abysmal and about the excessive spending on administration: they want efficient, transparent public services. That doesn't mean establishing new layers of government or breaking up an already fractured system even further: it means making public services literally service-and outcome-oriented, and appointing public servants on the basis of merit and competence.

Citizens care about rising crime and they want a modern and effective police response to this.

Let me repeat – none of these priority concerns of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina should come as a surprise to any candidate running for election.

Addressing these concerns for political parties should mean finding constructive solutions to the challenges citizens face. Citizens should therefore carefully look at how political parties answer the following questions.

How will parties attract investment to create new jobs?

How will parties make bureaucracy less expensive and more efficient and how will they structurally reduce corruption?

How will parties organise a successful response to rising crime?

BiH voters want these questions answered!

They are not satisfied with name-calling. They want a plan of action.

They will support parties that say: Here are our solutions – to unemployment, to the poor investment climate, to poverty and to the scourges of crime and corruption.

They will support parties that say: Here is how we are concretely and realistically going to implement these solutions.

It is an unchallengeable fact that the only parties that can deliver solutions after the elections are those that can cooperate effectively and pragmatically with other parties.

Candidates need to build a positive environment for progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina through serious and constructive debate.

The election campaign can be about the same old grievances or it can be about solutions.

Only articulating grievances will not make the grievances go away. Articulating solutions will make the grievances go away – and the only solutions that work in this country are solutions capable of winning broad support.

Citizens should distinguish between candidates and party leaders who focus on grievances – and those who focus on realistic solutions.

The 3 October elections will decide between the two – and citizens will have to live with the consequences of that choice for the next four years.

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