

Opening Remarks by HR and EUSR Valentin Inzko at the Inaugural Session of “Generation BiH for Europe”



A new Generation of Citizens for a Fresh Beginning

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you for agreeing to participate in this two-day conference. I believe that the discussions that will take place here and the proposals that are formulated can generate radical change in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And there are few citizens who would not welcome such change.

The status quo is very far from satisfactory.

While progress in this country has stalled, it has picked up speed in neighbouring countries.

Neighbouring countries have shown that they are prepared to try new solutions. They are prepared to adapt. They have decided conclusively that they do not want what they have had until now.

They want something better.

That is a decision that has to be taken here in Bosnia and

Herzegovina too.

It has to be taken by politicians and it has to be taken by citizens if the country is to move beyond the present impasse.

I believe that the people in this room can point the way to something new, something better. Something that hasn't been tried.

I believe that you can offer an alternative to failure.

This country needs that alternative.

It needs to find and apply creative solutions to the problems that have persisted for years. And it needs to go with what works.

As we all know, the very opposite has been happening – there has been a disastrous regression to attitudes and policies of the past.

The results of this regression are clear for everyone to see – new and unnecessary political and social tensions, high unemployment, falling living standards and a paralysed government and administrative system.

It is common sense that when a country's people are becoming poorer, when its authorities are unable to honour their financial commitments, when its schools and hospitals are understaffed and under-funded, and when the only growth industry is corruption and crime – that something must change.

I believe that the proposals that you formulate at this conference can begin a return to common sense in BiH politics.

I believe that you can launch the necessary process of radical change.

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Politics since the elections have focused on wrong priorities

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- the employment of ministers and senior administrative officials, rather than finding jobs for hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers;
- media freedom – not on how important it is but on how some powerful individuals believe it should be curtailed.

While the focus has been on these issues, millions of Euros in international development aid have been lost because the state authorities could not be formed in time to pass an annual budget.

Clearly, the BiH political establishment is in desperate need of new ideas, new energy, a new focus. And this is where you, a successful new generation, come in. Your fresh perspectives are needed to move this country forward, through your work and your networks. You have the experience which helps you to analyse the challenges citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina face, and to recommend ways forward.

Citizens must offer political leaders an alternative to the politics of the past and propose recommendations based on the politics of common sense. And successful and ambitious young people like you who are gathered here today are especially well-positioned to do this effectively.

Eight months after the general elections, the parties have agreed that the time has come to begin talks about the possibility of forming a government.

The people should not have been made to wait eight months – but at least the serious work of forming a Council of Ministers has finally begun, and this is to be welcomed.

It must be made clear to the party leaders that the first and most urgent task of the Council of Ministers is to tackle the scandalous and unsustainable levels of unemployment and

poverty, the woeful state of public services and the prevalence of crime and corruption.

There is profound popular anger that the situation has been allowed to get this bad. The only way to assuage that anger is to show common sense and return to the policies of modernisation and European integration that were beginning to deliver positive improvements in living standards until few years ago.

The status quo is unacceptable: We have a constitution that denies basic human rights, a political system that guarantees gridlock and benefits obstructionists, an economy that is contracting, and a political elite that doesn't see any particularly urgent need to fix this.

If you produce creative proposals to remedy Bosnia and Herzegovina's political, economic and social malaise, we in the International Community will support you.

Presenting such proposals to the incoming authorities would be a legitimate and constructive step towards helping them get back on the right road.

Among other things, that means implementing the European Partnership and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement – a strategy to which all the mainstream parties are publicly committed.

I hope that over the next two days you will begin to formulate compelling proposals, and I hope you will lobby energetically to have your proposals adopted and implemented by the incoming authorities.

Thank you