

Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko, Circle 99, Sarajevo 17 May 2009

A Fresh Approach

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm particularly glad to have this discussion with you at the beginning of my mandate.

Our meeting today rounds off a week in which I have had an opportunity to speak with political science students and then with members of parliament.

My conclusions so far are that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs fresh political thinking.

What I would like to do together with you this morning is explore creative ways of revitalising the political system. I say "creative" but by that I don't necessarily mean theoretical. I'm talking about practical strategies that can have a real and rapid political impact.

Now, let me get one thing out of the way at the very beginning.

We can spend a lot of time this morning talking about whether or not the High Representative should use the Bonn Powers.

But that discussion isn't going to get us where we should be trying to go – and that is to a situation where the people of

Bosnia and Herzegovina and their representatives address the challenges they face, through normal, democratic dialogue.

So I will say at the start – the Bonn Powers are part of my mandate and I intend to implement my mandate. This morning, I do not intend to spend more time on the topic than that.

What I *do* want to do is discuss with you the steps that can be taken by BiH politicians, NGOs and citizens as a whole to get us out of the present political rut.

When these steps have been identified, as High Representative and EU Special Representative, I will do everything I can to make sure that they are taken successfully.

I'd like to raise a few points and then open the floor to discussion.

Practical Parliamentary Politics

As I said to parliament this week, I believe it is crucially important that we take the European integration agenda out of day-to-day political manoeuvring.

We must focus on getting agreements on key laws that deliver the benefits of closer EU integration.

We must stop holding these laws hostage to larger political strategies.

There are practical steps that can be taken to make this happen.

On Tuesday I suggested to MPs that they change their rules of procedure in order to speed up the consideration of EU laws.

They could also formalize coordination between state and entity parliamentary EU integration committees.

Another thing they could do is strengthen the Joint Committee for European Integration.

These measures would make it possible for MPs to focus on resolving disagreements over strategically important legislation.

This is first and foremost a question of parliamentary management – of finding a more efficient way to ensure the thorough and constructive discussion of legislation and the swift passage of the laws this country needs.

Dayton is not the Source of Every Problem

There is often a tendency to blame everything in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the shortcomings of the Dayton system – but the fact is that a lot of things could be improved if more attention were focused on practical administration.

I think of this every time I see the plastic bottles that are collected at various points along the Miljacka – and along most other rivers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Those bottles aren't there because of Dayton. They are there because resources are not being allocated in an optimal way.

A huge amount of political energy is focused on issues that are too general, instead of on more modest topics like rubbish collection.

The truth is that it's possible to handle the big issues and the small ones at the same time.

Look at the examples of Ireland and Singapore.

Both had to accommodate the competing aspirations of distinct communities; but in the meantime they managed to raise living standards.

They didn't put one task off until they had finished the other. The very opposite: they understood that by increasing administrative efficiency, by attracting investment and creating jobs, they could create more promising circumstances for a political settlement.

Ireland, by the way, is geographically more remote from its main markets than Bosnia and Herzegovina is. And Singapore, in dramatic contrast to Bosnia and Herzegovina, has no natural resources.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has the geographical position and the resources that could make it enormously competitive. What it doesn't yet have is a political and administrative culture that is capable of exploiting that. It's time to unleash the huge potential that this country has!

A Vision of the Future

Some will continue to argue that profound philosophical differences have to be overcome before we can really move the country forward.

But here again I think the example of Ireland may be instructive.

The political settlement that was achieved in Northern Ireland a decade ago was based on accepting that the two communities had different aspirations but that they could arrive at a *modus vivendi*.

That *modus vivendi* made sense because of the Republic of Ireland's rapid economic growth and because Britain and Ireland experienced a confluence of policy in almost every aspect of public life through membership of the European Union.

It is clear that there is now a new political and economic

reality in the Western Balkans. It is high time that Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived at a modus vivendi that will allow this country to take advantage of that.

The rest of the region is moving on. Bosnia and Herzegovina must exploit the opportunities this creates and move on too.

New Thinking

To do that, we need new thinking. Circle 99 has an unparalleled record as a champion of open and inclusive dialogue. I believe this dialogue must be advanced today in innovative ways.

Thomas Aquinas famously cautioned against “the man of one book.” He didn’t say which book. It could be any book. It could even be a very good book. The point is that we need a plethora of books, a plethora of ideas – because out of that mix will come a fresh approach.

Consensus and Common Sense

I have been criticised for urging BiH politicians to build consensus and follow the dictates of common sense.

Frankly, I find this criticism mystifying.

I call for consensus because consensus works. It has been achieved in societies that have faced challenges of the same magnitude as those being faced by Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I call for common sense because BiH citizens will benefit more from common sense than from divisive rhetoric.

It’s common sense to make the necessary arrangements for MPs to consider EU-integration laws thoroughly and swiftly.

I believe in doing what is right. That's not whimsical or naïve. It makes political sense, because most citizens believe the same thing.

That's the real majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina – not an ethnic majority but a majority of those who want to live in a free and prosperous country that's part of the European Union.

Those who have until now stood in the way of Euro-Atlantic integration are being naïve. They believe the people will let them do that indefinitely.

They won't.

I am on the side of the majority – and I believe the majority will prevail.

Now, let's talk!

Thank you