

Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko, At the Opening of GRAPOS Expo 2010



Fix the Economy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a genuine pleasure to be here with you today.

The GRAPOS Expo is an impressive showcase for successful businesses and their products – and it is also a showcase for the things that can go right in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the business potential that can be turned into new jobs, the investments that can blossom so that they deliver benefits not only to the investors themselves but to workers and their families, to consumers and to the community as a whole.

This is a model that we want to see applied all across the country.

I know that Gracanica has been a leader when it comes to economic recovery. The local authorities together with local businesses have taken sensible steps to start turning the

commercial potential of this area into businesses that can create and sustain employment.

The success and the variety of businesses, products and services on display at this expo testify to what has been achieved in this community.

Well, if it can be done in Gracanica it can be done in other communities.

This is a message that should go out loud and clear at the beginning of this year's election campaign – the potential exists to turn Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic fortunes around.

Individual communities have been able to do this – but the country as a whole has not, and that is because far too much political energy goes into unproductive disagreements, and not nearly enough goes into fixing the economy.

This is glaringly visible when politicians squabble over who has the right to do what – instead of applying positive energy to attracting investment, liberalising the labour market, simplifying the laws and regulations on starting a new business and hiring new workers, and getting the right product quality and certification systems in place.

Let me here stress that all of these things are part of the EU accession process.

And none of them is currently getting anything like the public or political attention it deserves.

The story in Gracanica has been more positive.

The Gracanica Association of Entrepreneurs and the Tuzla Chamber of Commerce have played a key role in promoting and developing the GRAPOS Expo in cooperation with the Federation and the Tuzla Canton authorities. This is an ideal model – where the business community takes the lead and the

responsible authorities offer support in an appropriate and timely way.

It is a model that should be applied right across the BiH economy – so that the initiative and dynamism of companies and communities receives the right support from the authorities.

For this to happen on a national scale, the issue of the business environment – and what's wrong with it – has to be part of the election campaign.

How can Bosnia and Herzegovina's investment promotion overseas be made more effective? How quickly can barriers to investment be eliminated? (As many of you will know, the long and complicated procedure required for investors to establish legal residence here is in itself a disincentive to creating new jobs.)

These questions demand credible answers.

It would help every voter in a fundamental and practical way if answers to these questions could be thrashed out before October.

As I mentioned earlier, there are politicians and civil servants who understand what has to be done in order to turn the economy around and who are working hard to resolve problems. The GRAPOS Expo offers an example of what can be achieved when policymakers, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs come together to make things better.

Thank you