

Speech by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko at a Conference on Regional Cooperation as a Factor of Stability and Development



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A New Architecture in the Western Balkans

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Half a century ago the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, summed up the *zeitgeist* of the post-colonial world when he told skeptical members of parliament in Cape Town that “a wind of change” was blowing across the African continent.

Macmillan added that, whether his listeners liked it or not, this phenomenon was “a political fact”.

Some of the Prime Minister’s audience resisted the change he described, and spent the next thirty years in collective denial, vainly trying to hold back a political process that was unstoppable.

Half a century on, we can see very clearly the way in which that wind of change reshaped not just Africa but the whole world, replacing the colonial architecture of the first part of the 20th century with a new paradigm in which countries such as China, Brazil, India and South Africa emerged as dominant players.

The moral of this is that you cannot turn back history.

You cannot pretend that the world around you remains the same.

It doesn't remain the same. It changes.

It changes constantly.

It changes significantly.

And the only sensible response to such change is to live *with* it and benefit *from* it.

This matters to everyone in our region – because today a wind of change is blowing across Southeast Europe, a new architecture is being completed in the Balkans.

Some leaders have recognised this fact and are beginning to leverage the change into benefits for their own people.

Others have yet to understand what is happening around them.

A New Architecture

We are meeting in Podgorica this week after four months of intensive bilateral and multilateral exchanges in the region that, taken together, can justly be described as an evolving New Architecture of the region.

The resolution adopted by the Serbian parliament in March, apologising for the massacre in Srebrenica in 1995, created a necessary context for a long process of reengagement. The Serbian parliament's initiative made progress possible in

political, judicial, social and diplomatic spheres.

As spring took hold, leaders in the region demonstrated a real capacity to break down barriers.

In mid April Croatian President Ivo Josipovic asserted in the BiH parliament in Sarajevo that, "a new time has come, which calls for a new policy from all of us" and he added that the key must be to "find strength to overcome suspicion and fear."

This strength has not been absent in recent months.

President Josipovic visited Bosnia and Herzegovina again in May, when, along with RS President Rajko Kuzmanovic, RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik and Party of Democratic Action leader Sulejman Tihic, he honoured the memory of victims of the war and called for a decisive break with the past and for active cooperation among all communities that share the same space.

At the end of April, in Istanbul, Serbian President Boris Tadic, Turkish President Abdullah Gul and President of the BiH Presidency Haris Silajdzic agreed that problems in Southeast Europe can only be solved through dialogue and through "the preservation of the region's multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious" character.

In Istanbul, the Bosnian and Serbian leaders signed a declaration pledging to settle remaining differences over borders, property and debt, and to discuss a joint approach to international markets.

Turkey's proactive and constructive role in fostering dialogue among countries and communities in the region has been enormously helpful, and has dovetailed with the efforts of the European Union – and the efforts of each of the governments in the Western Balkans to promote their own EU accession agenda. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey's initiative has also had the active support of the Peace Implementation Council.

Since the Istanbul meeting there has been a flurry of high-level visits between Belgrade and Sarajevo, and President Tadic and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan have both indicated that they will attend next week's solemn commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Srebrenica Massacre.

President Tadic was in Bosnia and Herzegovina in late May. In Banja Luka he emphasised that no community will lose out as a result of fundamental changes that are now underway – every community will gain and every community should be actively involved in advancing this new and constructive process.

At the end of May, in Sarajevo, President Vujanovic joined Presidents Josipovic, Tadic and Silajdzic in a formal pledge to improve relations and cooperation – reflecting and vindicating work that regional NGOs have been doing for a decade in the context of the Igman Process.

Speaking after the Sarajevo meeting, each of the participants stressed that, while countries in the region are at different stages in their road towards full EU integration, the integration process serves as a crucial common paradigm, a joint architecture that offers coherence to bilateral relationships.

Again, stress was laid on the fact that no one stands to lose and everyone stands to gain from this process.

President Vujanovic noted the primary importance of the “values” which are embedded in the European integration process and which can sustain the internal development and external relations of the Western Balkan countries.

At the beginning of June, during the EU-Western Balkans meeting organised in Sarajevo by the Spanish Presidency, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and European Commission Vice-President Catherine Ashton, and

Commissioner for Enlargement Štefan Füle reaffirmed the underlying premise of eastward expansion, which is that the Western Balkans are essential components of an enlarged European Union.

Western Balkan participants in the meeting promised to intensify the pace of reforms and further strengthen cooperation among themselves in the move towards Europe.

Commissioner Füle called for not just a will to resolve problems the region faces, but “a collective will” to resolve collective problems. This “collective will” that overcomes rifts of the past, aims at regional reconciliation and looks to a common future for the region within the European Union is exactly what I would define as the essential element of the emerging architecture of this region.

In the first half of 2010 we have seen incontrovertible evidence that this collective will *does* exist and that it is now strong enough and sustained enough to overcome strategic problems.

Already we have seen significant progress in meeting EU visa requirements, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and elsewhere, progress to which the European Union has responded speedily and constructively. Indeed, in each of the countries in the region, the European Union has sought to establish long-term partnerships based on the realities on the ground and characterised by extensive financial and technical aid, and positive political and diplomatic engagement.

To cap this extended period of diplomatic progress, the Summit of the Southeast European Cooperation Process concluded just two weeks ago with a declaration committing participants to take their countries “into European and Euro-Atlantic structures and to strengthen common values in the entire region.”

Those common values are market democracy, open society, and

respect for individual and civil rights.

It is worth noting that at the SEECP Summit, Montenegro took over the rotating chairmanship of the SEECP, which will in turn be succeeded by Serbia. For the next two years the Western Balkans will be in the driving seat of a broader regional integration process.

Coming to Terms with Change

Until now BiH citizens have been denied many of the advantages that can come from the hugely improved regional climate, from the new architecture.

There are three reasons for this.

The first is familiar: Bosnia and Herzegovina has an expensive and inefficient government system and a sprawling bureaucracy – this makes it enormously difficult to steer even the simplest and least contentious initiative through public and parliamentary debate and implement it as a coherent policy.

The second reason is that politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina have not moved with the times.

The system can be *made* to work if there is *a will* to make it work – but the will that we have seen so amply demonstrated in recent months all across the region has yet to come into the ascendant in Bosnia and Herzegovina itself.

The wind of change is blowing – it's blowing right through Bosnia and Herzegovina – but those in power haven't recognized what is happening.

They will in due course, but they haven't so far.

And the third reason is that we are in the midst of an extended election campaign, in which the default political position appears to be “noisy intransigence”. Some leaders seem to believe that the fastest way to electoral advantage is

to say “no” – whatever the question.

The calculation is that voters want more of what they have had in the past and that they do not want constructive proposals that can win consensus.

All of the polling, however, indicates that this calculation is wrong – voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina do *not* want more of the same. They want positive change – the sort of change they have seen in neighbouring countries. They want to be architects of a better future, instead of being trapped in the past.

This reflects the changing *zeitgeist* – and it demands a political about-turn.

The question is not *if* but *when* this will happen.

It can even happen in the course of this election campaign – it can be reflected at the 3 October polls.

Or it may take longer, which would be a great pity because that means that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina would have to wait longer before they can enjoy the benefits of the new architecture.

We will watch in the coming months for evidence of change in the election debate, indicating that political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina have grasped that they are no longer operating in the same environment. The fact is that the world has moved on, and they must move on with it or they will become casualties of change rather than its beneficiaries.

Frankly, I do not see the logic of sticking to policies that have manifestly failed to deliver prosperity and security.

I see an overwhelming logic in applying inside Bosnia and Herzegovina the same rapprochement that has been stunningly visible in the region.

I see an overwhelming logic in abandoning the intransigence of the past and embracing a fresh approach.

As you know, Montenegro representatives of the BiH-Montenegro Parliamentary Friendship Group just a few days ago visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they discussed prospects for increased trade between the two countries and the feasibility of initiatives such as restoring the former railway link.

It is a fact that the legacy of the past conflict has metamorphosed into a relationship in which the predominant theme is cooperation and mutual advantage – the times have changed and with it attitudes and politics and ways of interacting have changed.

A Willingness to Find Solutions

The future belongs to the brave – and to the creative and the inclusive and the constructive and the innovative and the optimistic.

The great cloud of pessimism that has hovered for so long over the Western Balkans is at last being dispersed. We don't see in the bright sunlight of optimism the sudden appearance of solutions. What we see is the appearance of a willingness to find solutions, to *negotiate* solutions, to *create* solutions, to *build* something together.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its enormous human and natural resources, stands to benefit hugely from this positive change. There is an appetite for problem solving and I believe that this appetite will prevail.

Some may resist the wind of change that is blowing across our part of the continent – but they cannot resist indefinitely, and the sooner this change is embraced, the sooner it will deliver the transformation that all of us want to see, and that is that all the states of the Western Balkans achieve stability and prosperity – through Euro-Atlantic integration

and through the preservation of their distinctive characteristics and the full development of their individual potential.

I am hopeful that in the coming months the same progress can be made in Bosnia and Herzegovina that has been made right across the region since the beginning of the year.

Thank you