

Speech by the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Valentin Inzko



Thirty-two Weeks to Implement an Agenda that Matters

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is good to be back at the Faculty of Political Science. I was here last May, soon after I took up my duties as High Representative and EU Special Representative. On that occasion we had a lively exchange of opinion. I look forward to continuing this dialogue.

I'm especially pleased to be here in the context of a Masters' programme in which many of you are undertaking advanced studies in European integration, public administration, and international relations. These and other academic disciplines can play a key role in helping Bosnia and Herzegovina navigate a path towards full postwar recovery.

As the EU Special Representative in this country I fully support greater emphasis on the EU related academic curricula, which this post-graduate programme represents. Joining the EU and functioning as a member of the EU requires a substantial reserve of expertise, and I am happy to see that this expertise is being developed at this level because that will

have a direct and positive impact on helping this country reach its top strategic objective – joining the European Union and functioning as any other member state.

The fact is that the country has sailed into choppy waters, and the present navigation is fitful.

We are currently in the midst of a series of key meetings that I hope will help us chart a more satisfactory course.

I am going to speak this morning about the status of Bosnia and Herzegovina's effort to integrate in the EU and NATO. In effect, this means examining the overall political and economic picture – because Euro-Atlantic integration affects and reflects just about every aspect of development

In the last year – amid a general atmosphere of doom and gloom – there have been a handful of examples of technical progress.

These include the introduction of biometric passports and other requirements related to securing visa-free travel.

But beyond this, there is little positive to report.

Progress on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application to participate in a NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan, a preliminary step towards NATO membership, has been sacrificed to the overall climate of political grandstanding. The country's application was rejected at the end of last year by NATO. That decision will be reviewed in April, but none of the required steps laid out by NATO in November have yet been taken – so it is hard to see how a positive decision is any more likely in the spring.

In the meantime, none of the reforms necessary to increase the competencies of the BiH state so that it can participate meaningfully in the EU accession process has been adopted.

So, let us be quite clear – Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress towards NATO and the European Union is at a standstill. As a

result, citizens are not enjoying any of the benefits that accompany the EU integration process.

BiH's progress on the European path has been stopped by political leaders who have failed to enact or implement reforms to which they previously committed themselves.

This is where we are.

It is not where Bosnia and Herzegovina should be.

It is emphatically not where the vast majority of this country's people want to be.

Our task today is – very clearly – to find a way of getting back onto the high road to Euro-Atlantic integration.

I want to add, and not simply as an aside, but as a central element in this task – perhaps *the* central element – that getting back on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration also means enacting and implementing long-delayed economic reforms that will help reverse the spread of poverty.

It has become routine to refer to the last few years as a period of political deadlock. This is only half the story and not the most important half. The last few years have been a period of sharply rising material hardship for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

That fact alone should be sufficient impetus to end the deadlock.

International commitment

As you know, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, has just completed a two-day trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina – during which she spoke very frankly about the failure of the

political establishment here to act in the interests of citizens.

She pointed out – and this needs to be repeated again and again – that it isn't for politicians to decide how much European integration they will grant citizens. Citizens have made it clear that this is what they want and it's up to the politicians to deliver. The whole exercise isn't for the benefit of party leaders – it's for the benefit of the people.

Baroness Ashton was here just a few days after a delegation from the European Parliament headed by Eduard Kukan visited Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I think it is worth pointing out that Baroness Ashton has been the European Union's chief foreign policy official for less than three months. The fact that she, along with other senior officials, has already visited Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that this country has moved back to the top of the EU policy agenda.

Unfortunately, this has not been because of anything good.

As you will recall, in May last year, just four months after the new administration took office in Washington, Vice President Joe Biden visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with Javier Solana. That trip was followed by the renewed engagement of the US and the EU, spearheaded by James Steinberg and Carl Bildt, designed to break the constitutional and political deadlock.

The US and the European Union are committed to working with BiH stakeholders to get the country back onto the road to Euro-Atlantic integration and economic recovery.

This effort has not yet succeeded, because – until now – it has been undermined by the limitations of politics in this country.

Let me stress that I am not making a blanket condemnation.

There are men and women of integrity working in political parties, and in the various branches of the legislature and the executive.

But the fact is that the political establishment has failed.

By design or by default it has been unable to make progress on the reform agenda.

I believe there are three underlying reasons for this.

The first is the constitutional settlement, which pays inordinate attention to dividing up political spoils and not nearly enough attention to providing citizens with efficient and cost-effective government

The second is that politics haven't changed for two decades. One of the most dispiriting aspects of the recent past has been the ease with which discredited attitudes, slogans and political positions from the early nineties have resurfaced.

The third is that an alternative political option has not been put forward in a sufficiently compelling way.

Three, two, one

I said one, two and three – but I believe the solution to the problem is actually three, two, one.

We need alternative politics, which will change the way of doing business that has been established in the last two decades; and that in turn will make it possible to change the constitution and get the country back on track for integration and recovery.

What do people in Bosnia and Herzegovina really want? When I say “people” I don't mean a particular people. I mean all the

people – from north to south, east to west, every class, every age, every persuasion.

They want two things – security and prosperity.

Now, here is an astonishing fact.

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina can have these two things.

This fundamental truth has been totally obscured in the last three years, when practical politics have been replaced by name-calling and brinksmanship.

There is an agenda for delivering security and prosperity – the Euro-Atlantic integration agenda.

- It's about modernizing the armed forces so they can operate as a functioning and valued component of the world's leading military alliance
- It's about modernizing the police service so as to end the tyranny of organized crime and corruption
- It's about modernizing the business environment to attract investment and create jobs
- It's about modernizing the health system and the education system
- It's about modernizing the way citizens' rights and aspirations are protected and promoted

It is this agenda that has been brought to a complete standstill by the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

32 weeks

I said that the parties had so far failed either by design or default.

We can argue about their calculations and preoccupations – what is not in dispute is the fact that they have failed.

The evidence is all around us, in the form of mass poverty and unemployment and utterly unacceptable levels of crime and corruption.

The only way to change this is to get the option of Euro-Atlantic integration back on the table quickly and with full and competent force.

This is the alternative politics that Bosnia and Herzegovina desperately needs.

This is the approach that has been tried and tested all across the continent. It will work for this country too.

Step number three is to return this option to the centre of public debate.

The parties must be challenged.

What are you doing to take this country into NATO and the European Union?

In the past year, my office has supported a series of public discussions about what is required to reform this country in the context of European integration. These public events have targeted all sectors of society, from parliamentarians to civil society actors – and I should stress that my office actively supports civil society actors because they have an indispensable role in the political process that must be recognized by institutions and political parties. We have also reached out to the media – because this country's destiny must be decided not just by a small number of professional politicians but through continuous and comprehensive public debate.

The political parties must be forced to abandon the politics that have miserably failed.

There is one issue the political parties – be it either in government or in opposition – must not use for pre-election purposes. Its importance simply goes beyond elections as it affects the stability of the country as a whole and the well being of its citizens. I am talking about the current financial crisis (mainly) in the Federation BiH. We have to understand that technical, financial and political support to Bosnia and Herzegovina is available but can be provided only if the country clearly demonstrates its commitment to reform. The current system is financially unsustainable, economically inefficient and socially unfair. This must change! Difficult decisions are necessary and can no longer be delayed. The financial situation has deteriorated to the point that it requires an immediate and joint action by all. It is time for the government to make the decisions and for the opposition to be constructive. The cost of non-action or possible alternative measures is simply too high.

I ask you to judge your politicians on what they have done to bring this country closer to the EU, what they have done for economy, for improvement of the health care and educational system, for more employment possibilities etc.

I also ask you not to reward at the next elections those who are using hate speech, nationalistic rhetoric and those who are not willing to compromise.

I would like to see the clash of arguments to prevail over personal attacks. Some of your politicians are shameless. They attack my stuff which is highly professional and which I fully support. The International community will not take the responsibility for their failures!

The clock is ticking. The elections are only 32 weeks away.

Thirty-two weeks to get this country back onto the road to Euro-Atlantic integration and economic recovery.

If the parties in power cannot do that – they can be removed

by the electorate.

If they can get back to the agenda that matters, then they will also be able to get down to the serious business of fixing the government system.

Do not believe those who blithely argue that nothing can be done to help the people of this country until after the elections are over.

It isn't true.

The parties must restart the Euro-Atlantic integration process and begin combating poverty before the elections.

As High Representative and EU Special Representative I am supporting the change that this country needs.

Other members of the international community are supporting this change.

Senior US and EU policymakers are supporting this change.

The question now is this:

Will the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina make this change happen?

Because it is in their power to do that.

Thank you