The Politics of Recovery Can Be Built In Srebrenica

By Valentin Inzko

After years of stalemate, economic decline and mounting social problems, Bosnia and Herzegovina has entered a more hopeful phase. A Council of Ministers has been formed and all of the coalition parties are committed to tackling the economic crisis and getting the country back on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration.

There are grounds to believe that among the main parties and the main party leaders the political will now exists to turn a new page, to stop looking backwards and to start solving the real problems that BiH citizens face. This is the climate in which the parties are preparing to contest the local elections in October and nowhere will the changed political atmosphere be more important than in Srebrenica.

I have visited Srebrenica a number of times since I became High Representative three years ago. My commitment to the people of this community has always been at the forefront of my efforts on behalf of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. This is because I believe that all of us, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and foreigners, have a fundamental duty as human beings to comfort and protect the relatives of the victims of crime and to confront and bring to justice those individuals who have perpetrated crime.

The genocide that was committed at Srebrenica is a heavy burden to bear, but we must always remember that it is the families whose loved ones have been torn from them, that carry the heaviest burden. While there are some who continue to deny this fact they cannot deny that Srebrenica is a special place and that it deserves special attention.

That was agreed in 2008 and, after all, that is why, for example, RS Minister of Education Anton Kasipovic went to Srebrenica recently to broker a deal which brought all the children back to their desks again. And there are other positive examples which show that the RS authorities can recognise Srebrenica's specificity, and can, if they choose to, act to assert and uphold it.

I believe that a party political agreement can be reached that will ensure that all of the people of Srebrenica have full and fair representation after the municipal elections, while also ensuring that the victims of the horrible crimes that took place there are duly honoured. Out of respect for the victims and their families, and in the interests of normal coexistence in the town, political parties must engage in genuine dialogue.

Such an agreement would open the way for unseen social and economic developments that will benefit the entire community and the entire country. After all, apart from the processes of justice and reconciliation, the most important issue for Srebrenica is the need for a healthy economy. In this way, reconciliation and recovery could go hand in hand

The municipality has significant economic resources that have remained untapped as political energy has been channelled away from development issues. The forthcoming election campaign offers an opportunity for the parties to make it clear that they see a path out of this impasse and that they have made up their minds to follow that path. Now is not the time for politicians to retreat behind political positions but for party leaders to lead.

Real political leadership means building solutions which will be in the interest of the current and former residents of Srebrenica. This will also help many more former residents to return to their homes. They have suffered too much and too long to again find themselves the subject of political tension

and manipulation. This is the politics of genuine recovery and hope that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina need – and it can begin in Srebrenica. Politicians at the municipal, entity and state level have a rare opportunity. They must seize it.