



Press Conference following the session of the PIC Steering Board

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for coming.

The Communiqué has been adopted and you should have all received a copy. However, I wanted to talk to you directly in order to highlight some of the thinking behind the main points in the Communiqué.

First of all, let me stress that there was consensus among PIC Steering Board members about what needs to be done in order to get Bosnia and Herzegovina back on a positive trajectory. Economic and political reforms, with full respect for the rule of law, are key elements in the country's agenda for recovery – and members of the Steering Board stand ready to help the new authorities implement that agenda.

The Steering Board welcomed the fact that the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU came into force on 1 June. This is important. It opens up the possibility of making life better for citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

But let's be clear – this is a possibility, it is not a guarantee. Things can get better, but for that to happen – for the possibility of progress to become reality – the new authorities must achieve much more in the next three and a half years than was achieved between 2006 and 2010. This applies at the state, entity, cantonal and municipal level.

Discussion at this meeting of the Steering Board was about delivering results. It was about how to make the most of opportunities that can still be seized.

The reforms that can be implemented by the new authorities – including the reforms prioritized by the EU – are sensible steps that will make it easier to invest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, start new companies and create new jobs.

This what the Steering Board is talking about when it talks about reforms. I believe this is what most BiH citizens want to hear. And I believe they would like to hear it from their own elected leaders. I hope those leaders will seize the opportunities that exist, and start delivering benefits to citizens.

The Steering Board is cautiously optimistic that the authorities – having been formed more quickly than four years ago – may act more effectively. The Steering Board assured the Chair of the Council of Ministers and his deputies that the authorities will have the full support of the International Community as they try to make up for the missed chances of recent years.

We also discussed the need to encourage the authorities to take steps to enhance transparency and efficiency in the BiH electoral system. It's true that the 2014 elections were in line with standards, and the Steering Board has already commended the Central Electoral Commission for its work. However, as we know, problems remain in Mostar.

In its discussion on the overall political situation in the country, the Steering Board also addressed the behaviour of some RS politicians who have sought to accumulate political capital by challenging the rule of law. It is a fact that the Entities exist by virtue of the BiH Constitution. The Entities are also subject to the authority of the BiH Constitutional Court, whose decisions are final and binding.

Let me also stress a simple fact, which the PIC has repeated time and again: Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty are guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Agreement. Those who believe otherwise are deluding themselves – and they are deluding those whom they aspire to lead. The PIC Communiqué is unambiguous regarding this issue.

However, as the High Representative has said, the primary focus of this meeting of the Steering Board was on supporting practical reforms that will ease the economic hardship of citizens and consolidate the peace and security of the country as a whole. This is where the priorities should lie in the coming months.

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Yesterday, the Peace Implementation Council met with the Mayor of Srebrenica, Camil Durakovic, who informed us about the ongoing preparations for the marking of the Srebrenica genocide. I want to congratulate the Organisational Committee for the work done so far and encourage them to continue along this path.

The aim is to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Srebrenica, both on the 11th of July and during other accompanying events, in peace and dignity. Having in mind the scope of this year's commemoration, it is expected that those who plan to attend the events related to Srebrenica will act in a dignified manner and to follow the instructions of the organisers.

I would also like to emphasize that the Steering Board paid its solemn respects to the memory of the victims of genocide and to their families.

At the same time, the PIC Steering Board underlined the need to promote re-conciliation among the peoples and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was also one of the messages of Pope Francis during his recent visit – that politicians and the people in BiH should work on long-term reconciliation and building a better future of this country.

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In the discussion on security issues affecting Bosnia and Herzegovina there was – this won't come as a surprise to anyone – a clear and unanimous view that extremism has no place in this country's democracy. I know that this has always been understood by the vast majority of citizens – regardless of their ethnicity or place of residence. Extremists form a very small part of the population but they have had a disproportionately large impact in the last 25 years. This extremist minority must not be allowed to dictate the political climate. The majority want tolerance and inclusivity.

I would like to take this opportunity to again express condolences to the family of Police Officer, who was killed in the attack on the police station in Zvornik in April, and express sympathies for the two wounded officers. I do this on behalf of all the members of the Steering Board. Let me say again: legal provisions exist to deal with attacks of this nature. The law is there to protect us and it must be respected.

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To sum up, this was a meeting where the nuts and bolts of practical policy were discussed.

There is a lot of work for BiH to do and the nature of that work is clear: there is an agenda of economic and political reforms that can help deliver greater security and prosperity to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We in the International Community are ready to assist the authorities as they begin to implement this agenda. We believe that the authorities can succeed. We believe that with positive political will, and with full respect for the rule of law, things can get better for this country and its citizens.

That is the underlying message from this meeting of the PIC Steering Board.

Now, we would be happy to take questions.