

Press Conference Following the Meeting of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council



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Remarks by the High Representative Valentin Inzko

Good afternoon,

Thank you all for coming.

I want to use this press conference to speak directly to you about the issues that we discussed today and also, of course, to answer any questions you may have.

Unfortunately, Russia did not support the text of today's communiqué in its entirety. I am sure that the Russian Federation will clarify their views and reasons, which is why I will not be giving any explanations on their behalf.

In light of the floods, this meeting of the PIC Steering Board political directors has taken place in extraordinary circumstances.

At the outset, let me say that the countries and organisations of the PIC stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina at this most difficult time as they come to terms with this terrible natural disaster.

The solidarity of the PIC members goes beyond words, with many of them already taking practical steps to help. Some of this help has already arrived in the affected areas. At times like this Bosnia and Herzegovina needs its international partners to be proactive and we are seeing this.

There is much work to be done, but in the days, weeks and months ahead I do believe that the people of this country will continue to find the strength and the energy to rebuild together, and that the international community will continue to provide needed aid and assistance to the recovery effort which is being led by domestic authorities.

On Tuesday, I visited the Ministry of Defence of BiH and Austrian EUFOR units, who are organising logistical support and helping to deliver aid. I have been impressed by the Armed Forces of BiH, who have again clearly demonstrated their value and their capacity to respond in a crisis and support the country when it most needs help.

In the midst of these difficult times, another ray of light and encouragement has been the bravery and solidarity exhibited by institutions, communities and individuals who have come together to help those in need. I was deeply touched by numerous scenes of ordinary citizens rushing to help people in need in neighboring cities and towns and across entity lines, risking their lives, and donating supplies and assistance.

This solidarity among people in a time of crisis has touched the whole world, but it has not surprised any of us who are familiar with this country. It has shown us once again that the people of this country are not interested in hearing about the divisions of the past. They want to build a successful country together in the interests of all.

The huge challenge facing the country at this difficult time certainly had a galvanising effect on the PIC's discussions

over the last two days.

The solidarity and practical cooperation of citizens throughout the country in this time of crisis has highlighted the need for political leaders and institutions as well to pull together and to work together for a better future for the ordinary citizens of this country.

This is going to require a change in approach by political parties and candidates hoping to win votes in the October elections. This is something that the PIC talked about over the last few days. And this is something which the country must talk about openly as we enter the pre-election period.

We believe that there is a chance that this will happen in the months ahead because after years in which public debate was practically monopolised by political parties, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have begun to stand up and speak up – not only to set out their demands but also to put forward their own solutions for how problems in a broad range of areas should be addressed.

This is a welcome and long awaited development which should be supported.

Again, the events of recent days will have a direct bearing on how things unfold over the long term in the broader political sphere. BiH citizens have won the admiration of people all across Europe and beyond for the way they have spontaneously organised humanitarian relief for those affected by the floods. And their response has been consistent with – and in some cases directly connected to – the new civic activism. This is going to have political consequences.

In the context of bringing relief to and securing a better future for the hard-pressed people of Bosnia and Herzegovina many of the Political Directors welcomed the broadening of the EU engagement during our discussion, and in particular the imminent launch of the Compact for Growth.

As you will know, this is an EU initiative designed to reinvigorate the economy and help create jobs – not ten years from now but in the short and medium term. It also envisages a renewed campaign against the corruption that has had such a damaging impact on all aspects of life in this country.

Members of the PIC Steering Board called on the parties to act NOW and to cooperate in adopting and implementing practical measures BEFORE the expiry of existing parliamentary and government mandates, and to ensure that the election campaign is focused on policy proposals and not on chauvinistic rhetoric.

In this context, a central message from this meeting is the international community's reaffirmation of its unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty. In 2014, no one should be challenging Bosnia and Herzegovina's right to exist and yet this is what we continue to encounter.

The Dayton Peace Agreement does not allow the entities to secede. And so such cheap rhetoric is a waste of time and energy given the real problems faced by this country in its entirety.

Of course, we have called for an end to such rhetoric in the past, and many parties and many politicians have preferred to stick to fear mongering as a way of bringing out the vote – but, as I have said, in the current circumstances are very different from previous years.

During our discussions, several PIC members also welcomed the recent by Serbian President Vucic to Sarajevo and his unequivocal support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We have had 12 months of popular discontent; we have had a year of citizens stepping into the vacuum left by politicians, and now we have had a terrible natural disaster – politics as

usual in the coming months? Absolutely not! As I said before, the approach to politics in this country needs to change fundamentally.

The situation has changed utterly. In our discussions, PIC political directors called on the parties in this new situation to behave in a new way. If they do not heed this call, citizens will be unforgiving.

In this context the chronic inability to resolve outstanding issues such as the 5+2 agenda, the implementation of the Constitutional Court's ruling on Mostar's electoral system, the registration of defence property and more recently the state-level resolution to the residency issue all have to be addressed – and they have to be addressed with a new urgency and a new seriousness.

Many of the PIC political directors during the meeting called on the parties to recognise that these and other issues can no longer be put on hold, and to act accordingly. We hope this will happen in the coming months because this is a win-win situation for the people of the country.

The communique reiterates full support for my Office and reminds all authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina that, under the terms of the Dayton Agreement, they have a legal obligation to cooperate fully with the OHR. The OHR is mandated to uphold the post-war settlement and help resolve problems related to peace implementation and recovery – the refusal of any domestic agency to cooperate with the OHR puts them at odds with the settlement and delays the recovery process.

Overall I have come away from this meeting impressed by the determination of the PIC Steering Board to finish our job here.

More than ever the International Community stands ready to work with those people of the country who want positive

change.

The country is clearly going through a period of monumental challenge – what is important is that it results in the positive changes the people are looking for – the creation of new jobs, convictions for corruption and improvements in the education and health care sectors.

And of course – to get the country back on track on the Euro-Atlantic path. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a seat waiting for it at the table, as the NATO Secretary General affirmed yesterday and the EU has stated many times, so its time for elected officials in this country to start delivering what is necessary for the country to take up that seat.

Everybody has a role to play and this will be especially important on Election Day when we need to see Bosnia and Herzegovina's voters to take their future in their own hands by voting.

So my message to all the voters watching at home is very simple – get out and vote on Election Day on 12 October. When you cast your ballots, don't vote out of fear, don't be intimidated, say "No" to any attempts to buy your vote, and don't expect anything to change if you don't participate.

Make your own choice and look to those parties who offer credible and concrete solutions to address the issues you care about.

Let there be no doubt whatsoever, the outcome of the vote on 12 October will determine your future and the future of your children. Make sure it is the right future.

I would now give the floor to my deputy, Tamir Waser, who will brief you on a few additional issues. Then we will be happy to take your questions.

Remarks by the Principal Deputy High Representative Tamir G.

Waser

As the High Representative has just said, this PIC Steering Board meeting was conducted in complete solidarity with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – not just empty expressions of solidarity, but solidarity expressed through concrete actions. PIC member states and organisations are already on the ground working with those affected by the flooding.

We heard from the UN about the real and serious challenge posed by mines in the clean up areas. Brcko, which has been hit especially hard, had a mine go off yesterday. So far, I am not aware of any deaths from mines, but that risk, which exists for too many people on a day to day basis, has only been heightened by these floods.

While people have rightly wanted to rush to help, caution is needed to ensure that areas are safe before people go in to clean up.

Faced with the enormous and immediate challenge of the floods, there might be a temptation to sideline or downgrade the importance of the political and economic issues that were on the PIC agenda.

Members of the PIC Steering Board took the view that we must address both – the immediate and the long-term challenges – at the same time. It's important to stress that if we can resolve the issues that were on the agenda of this PIC meeting then things will start getting better for the people of this country even as they come out of the present crisis.

There will be an attempt by some politicians in coming months to exploit the floods to cover up the economic mismanagement of recent years and to deflect blame. I think the people of BiH, who have suffered through years of high unemployment and stagnant economic growth, know better.

Let me also say that reports of people hoarding supplies,

raising prices to take advantage of the crisis and the efforts to skim a cut off relief supplies that will inevitably come are especially offensive. Any such allegations should be immediately investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

That's why we have focused on finding solutions to long-term, underlying problems that were already a challenge even before the recent catastrophe.

One example of that is Mostar. The failure of two political parties in that city to engage seriously in any effort reach agreement on holding municipal elections has become an unpleasant example of the broader failure of parties throughout the country to break the impasse of the past several years. While others have tried, SDA and HDZ BiH have simply refused to engage.

The first casualties of the Mostar deadlock are the people of Mostar. They haven't been able to vote for their local government for more than five years, and in those five years they've been forced to endure steadily deteriorating municipal services.

As the mayor said on Monday, he has trouble making the budget work because he cannot access the money set aside for city areas, which could provide needed capital investments, because of the lack of a city council.

The situation in Mostar is not just another political feud – it directly prevents investment and job creation in the city and affects people's everyday lives.

We want the people of Mostar to be released from the burden of dysfunctional administration; we want the mechanics of local government to move in precisely the opposite direction so that things don't simply deteriorate or stand still but that they actually get better; and we want to see obstruction replaced by cooperation and cooperation rewarded by a swift and

noticeable improvement in the quality of public services. That way Mostar can become a positive rather than a negative example for the rest of the country.

I reported to the PIC Steering Board that despite repeated promises by the leaders, I have seen no evidence of any serious efforts by SDA and HDZ BiH to address the issue. Instead, we've seen only an effort by HDZ BiH to do exactly what they claim they don't want others to do to them – leave one group outside the process.

Six parties in Mostar showed courage and leadership a year ago in developing a framework document that provided a good way forward. But the two other parties have simply said no.

The Steering Board reiterated that local elections must be held in Mostar no later than October, and Mostar must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic unit of local self-government, with some level of local authority/administration below that of the city – the arrangement which has been accepted in principle by all the main parties at the start of the facilitation effort in 2012.

As the High Representative has said, Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving into entirely new political territory. If the engagement of citizens remains high, a period of change is possible. I believe we can use this change to resolve issues that have resisted resolution until now. That is what I hope may now be possible in Mostar.