

Speech by High Representative Valentin Inzko to the United Nations Security Council



Mister President, Distinguished Members of the Security Council, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we stand ready to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and the tragic loss of life and suffering that followed, our continued commitment to our shared goal of irreversible peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina is more important than ever.

Our continued commitment is important for the country, its people and the wider region.

But it is also important for the affirmation of the inviolable values and principles of peace, co-existence, mutual respect and the sanctity of sovereign states that we hold so dear.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if ever there was a year for us to learn from the mistakes of the past and to remind ourselves that what happens to Bosnia and Herzegovina is important far beyond its borders, then that year is 2014.

And it is precisely because of this that I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the French-led efforts to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the First World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which I hope will not be used to promote divisions and conflict but to reflect on the

importance of peace.

Je tiens tout particulièrement à remercier la France et son ambassadeur en Bosnie et Herzégovine Gilles Roland pour son approche positive et visionnaire envers la commémoration du centenaire de l'attentat de Sarajevo.

Dans ce contexte, je tiens à saluer l'initiative prise par la France et sa Mission du Centenaire qui ont mobilisé de nombreuses énergies pour exprimer, depuis Sarajevo et la Bosnie Herzégovine, un message bâti autour du thème de la « réconciliation ».

Sur initiative de la France, nous allons – tous ensemble – envoyer un message de fraternité et de paix au monde entier le 28 juin prochain.

Ce noble message sera renforcé par un concert pour la paix par l'Orchestre Philharmonique de Vienne qui aura lieu ce même jour à Sarajevo.

* * *

Sadly in the six months that have elapsed since I was last here, the actions and behaviour of some of Bosnia and Herzegovina's elected officials and political leaders suggests that they have learned little from the mistakes of the past.

The same old mistake – putting the interests of a privileged political class before those of the country and its citizens – continues to be made.

Not once, not twice but over and over again.

I say this because the status quo and the current way of doing politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina is so very clearly working for just a chosen few – those who are in power or close to power.

Conversely it is simply not working for the average citizen in

Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The lack of urgency to reach the healthy compromises that are in the interests of the overwhelming majority of people in the country and are clearly necessary to take the country forward is becoming ever more difficult to understand and impossible to defend.

Entirely predictably the political situation has continued to deteriorate.

A snap shot of the last six months tells us all we need to know.

First – Progress on Euro-Atlantic integration has ground to a halt despite the commendable efforts of the European Union and NATO. The reason? Yet again Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders were unable to reach an agreement on changes that are required to implement the European Court of Human Rights "Sejdic-Finci" judgment, a condition for the country to move forward towards European Union candidacy and ensure the equality of all citizens.

Similarly, a lack of progress on military property continues to prevent Bosnia and Herzegovina from activating its Membership Action Plan with NATO.

Second – Despite notable increases in exports, the overall economic situation remains very difficult with the Entities relying on external budgetary support to pay the bills. Unemployment now stands at 44%.

Third – The legislative output of the State Institutions continues to fall well short of the needs of the country with more new laws being rejected than are adopted.

Fourth – Many verdicts of the BiH Constitutional Court, which are "final and binding" under the terms of the Peace Agreement remain unimplemented.

As a result, for example, voters in Mostar continued to be denied the right to elect their local government, which should have happened in 2012.

* * *

And as if all this was not enough, challenges to the Peace Agreement became ever more frequent and direct as the reporting period progressed. Senior politicians from Republika Srpska have sought to exploit the deeply worrying events in Ukraine to promote their own separatist agendas, repeatedly calling for and predicting the end of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Calls for a referendum on secession have similarly been repeated time and time again.

I have made clear repeatedly that the Dayton Peace Agreement does not allow for the entities to secede. The international community must continue to say clearly that our commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is absolute. And that is exactly what the 28 Foreign Ministers of the European Union did in April of this year.

Regrettably I am obliged to inform you that once again the challenges to the Peace Agreement in the reporting period have included not only statements, but also actions. In April the Republika Srpska government, at Entity level, adopted a Government Decision to regulate issues related to residence in response to the blockage of amendments to the State-level law in the upper House of the State Parliament.

However, residence is regulated by the State and it must continue to be regulated by the State.

As the PIC Steering Board has long made clear, we cannot have the Entities taking unilateral action in this way.

Unfortunately we also saw the Federation entity authorities

acting unilaterally last year in a way that compromised the single economic space of the country, although thankfully that issue is now moving towards a solution.

I also regret to inform you that the RS authorities continue to refuse to cooperate with me and my Office as required under Annex Ten of the Peace Agreement, by refusing to provide documents when they are requested to do so. The President of the Republika Srpska has boasted publicly that there would be no cooperation with my office.

* * *

What about positive developments? Sadly these have been few and far between. But there have been some.

The State Parliament finally managed to adopt the necessary technical amendment to enable elections to be held as required in October. It also adopted a welcome new law on public procurement in line with EU standards. And there have been important steps taken towards the full establishment and functioning of the Federation's Constitutional Court. There has also been some welcome progress with the State-level electricity transmission company – TRANSCO.

And as I mentioned earlier, exports have increased last year by 7%. This is also good news.

The regional situation and relations between the country and its neighbours also continues to improve. In this regard, Serbian Prime Minister Vucic's visit to Sarajevo, a groundbreaking and confidence-building visit to the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, two days ago is another significant and indeed welcome step towards reconciliation.

* * *

Nevertheless, I am increasingly concerned that the country is in danger of falling into a vicious downward cycle of spiteful

tit for tat politics that it will be difficult to emerge from.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has now been on a downward trajectory ever since the April package of constitutional changes in 2006.

Eight years is a long time for a country to be going the wrong way.

And as my Office has long warned, the country could not continue to go on in this way indefinitely without serious consequences.

And while nobody could predict exactly when there would be a public backlash against the ongoing failure of politicians to put citizens first – it was only a matter of time before it occurred.

This is what took place at the beginning of February, when we saw large scale protests.

Central to the demands of the protesters was that the authorities finally got serious about dealing with the mounting economic and social problems facing ordinary people and the rampant corruption gripping the country.

Regrettably the protests turned briefly violent on 7 February and significant damage was done to a number of public buildings in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica and Mostar with notable numbers of police officers and some demonstrators being injured, but thankfully without any loss of life. Peaceful protests continued thereafter, including some in the Republika Srpska.

The response of the political class has been mixed. While some politicians understood the clear messages of those protesting, others sought to misrepresent the protests as ethnically motivated or organized from outside the country. This was simply not the case.

Democracy is not simply a matter of holding elections every four years.

And in this respect, the peaceful protests and civic gatherings known as plenums represent a positive step forward to strengthen Bosnia and Herzegovina's democracy.

This new civic engagement is a sapling.

And as we all know even the tallest of oaks has to start to grow somewhere.

What is now required is that it is nurtured and supported by us for as long as it takes. It is especially important in this election year that this growth in activism continue as greater participation in all elements of the election process – from selection of candidates to discussions of concrete issues to voting on election day.

* * *

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now less than five months away from the next general elections, which I believe will be the most hotly contested elections since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in 1995.

I cannot hide my concern about the challenges that face us before we get to Election Day.

I am particularly concerned that in the coming months the ongoing controversy over residence and voting rights could lead to disputes on the ground, particularly in municipalities across Republika Srpska. This is a scenario that all involved must do everything within their power to avoid. It is especially important that no one is discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or because they are a returnee.

I am similarly concerned that the election campaign will once again be dominated by attempts to raise inter-ethnic tensions as a means to divert attention from the real problems facing

the country.

What Bosnia and Herzegovina badly needs to see in the forthcoming election campaign is a frank, robust and action-oriented public debate on how rampant corruption, exceedingly high unemployment, and of course the lack of progress on Euro-Atlantic integration are going to be urgently overcome by the incoming governments after the elections.

We need to hear more about plans to reform the economy and create jobs, which is in the vital interest of all citizens of the country regardless of ethnic group.

* * *

Ladies and Gentleman, the demonstrations we have seen are a clear wake up call for the political establishment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for the International Community.

As one of my esteemed predecessors pointed out recently – if we go on doing what we are doing we will go on getting what we are getting.

So after the next elections there is going to have to be a fundamental change in the way politics is conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina to focus on the needs of all citizens, not just the appetites of a chosen few.

Similarly the international community approach will need to evolve and do more to factor in the specificities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's history, its postwar settlement, and the risks to its future stability.

With this in mind, let me take this opportunity to express my very strong support for the robust policy direction laid out by the Foreign Ministers of the EU in their conclusions of 14 April, which I have already mentioned.

I would also like to mention the excellent cooperation and coordination with European Union Special Representative Peter

Sørensen, as well as between his office and my office on the ground.

* * *

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Clearly our job is Bosnia and Herzegovina is not yet complete.

This is the time to reaffirm our vision of a united and reintegrated Bosnia and Herzegovina that is the lynchpin of a peaceful and prosperous region.

This is the time to regroup and to recalibrate our approach.

This is the time to stand together united in support of the values and principles I spoke about at the beginning of my speech.

This means supporting those within the country who are ready to work together to reach the healthy compromises that are necessary to take the country forward.

And it means that we must stand firm against those who seek to sow division and disintegration.

It also means that we re-examine our approach while maintaining the tools which have ensured the peace, including the European Union military mission, EUFOR, with an executive mandate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Bosnia and Herzegovina has come a long way since 1995, but there is still some way to go.

Let us make sure that we continue to give the country the support it still needs to complete its long journey to lasting peace and stability.

Thank you.