

Remarks by HR Valentin Inzko at the conference “20 Years after Dayton Implementation: Challenges and Perspectives”

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Denis Prčić and the American University in BiH for organizing this important conference on the eve of the 20th Anniversary of Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and for inviting me to say a few words of welcome.

This is the right time to reflect on twenty years of implementing peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to see what lessons can be learned moving forward; and to look to the future.

The occasion of 20 years of peace should be an inspiration to the citizens and leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the international community, to do what we can individually and collectively to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina succeeds in becoming a stable and prosperous member of the European family of nations.

Despite the many difficulties facing this country and its peoples, I believe this goal is within reach.

On this occasion allow me to share with you a few brief reflections on the Dayton Peace Agreement, which I hope you will find useful in your discussions today.

The first point I want to make is often forgotten; and that is when it comes to an enduring peace, the Dayton Accords have been a phenomenal success.

This is sometimes taken for granted, but it should not be. As the tragedy that is being played out in Syria and beyond so painfully reminds us, peace should always be cherished.

The second point I would like to make is that, while the Dayton Framework is far from perfect, we should remember just how much was achieved in the first decade after the war within the Framework of Dayton.

Freedom of movement was established; a million refugees reclaimed their homes, for the first time ever after such a brutal conflict; the state Government was reinforced and entrenched; the economy was stabilized; and a new state judiciary had been established, along with a Bosnian legal codex.

Three armies that had fought each other now function as one under state control; a single intelligence service has been created to the highest European standards; a unified Customs service is now working effectively; a single country-wide indirect taxation system has been set up, giving stability to the state's finances; and free, fair and peaceful elections, run without international assistance, are the norm.

And so while the constitutional system of this country, like any country, will need to evolve, I do not accept that Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot make progress until the constitution is reformed.

If the country's leaders focus on working together for the good of the people, progress can be made today.

Indeed the initiative launched by the United Kingdom and Germany last year, which has now developed into the current Reform Agenda, has provided the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina with an opportunity to do this, and it is vital that they now grasp this opportunity with both hands.

The last point I want to make relates to the challenges we have seen to the Dayton Peace Agreement in recent years.

To reach our objective requires us to have a solid foundation and that foundation is Dayton. If you want that foundation to remain solid then you need to defend it when it is threatened. This is a lesson we have learned.

Dayton provides the constitution of the country and it provides clear procedures for the country to undertake much needed reform.

It should not be necessary to make the point twenty years after Dayton, but the BiH Constitution, the fourth Annex of the Peace Agreement, the foundation from which we must continue to build going forwards must be fully and consistently respected.

However, this is not what we see. Instead we continue to see an *a la carte* approach to the BiH Constitution and the Peace Agreement, where parties choose what they like and ignore the provisions don't suit them.

The most pressing case at this time is the referendum being threatened by the SNSD-led authorities in Banja Luka which directly challenges both State-level judicial authorities but also the decisions taken by my predecessors to implement the Peace Agreement.

For as long as the parties show themselves unwilling to consistently meet their basic obligation to fully respect the Peace Agreement, the International Community must continue to ensure respect for the Peace Agreement. Very simply put, the Constitution and the Peace Agreement must continue to be fully respected, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not open to discussion.

To conclude, for the country to secure lasting stability and a level of prosperity that will enable its citizens to live with dignity, a fundamental change of approach is needed, a new way of doing politics that puts the interests of citizens first.

The tendency to live in the past must end and instead the country must look decisively towards the future and consciously pull together to fulfill its self-declared ambition to be a fully integrated member of the Euro-Atlantic family.

Thank you.