

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

Check against delivery.

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

When I addressed the Council six months ago we were on the eve of the 20th Anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement. This was an opportunity to mark how far Bosnia and Herzegovina has come, but also to recognize that there is much more work needed to ensure lasting stability and a better future for the people of this beautiful country.

Against this backdrop, on 15 February the country took the historic step of applying for membership in the European Union. Bosnia and Herzegovina chose its direction clearly, and that direction is a future in the European Union.

Of course transition is a process and not an event; and the transformation the country must undergo on the path to membership will make Bosnians and Herzegovinians better off. Accordingly, we are fully united in supporting the country in its European Union aspirations.

What lies ahead for Bosnia and Herzegovina will undoubtedly be a challenging period, but it is one the country can navigate if all parties work together and fully respect the Dayton Peace Agreement.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stressed in my report, developments on the ground over the last six months have been mixed. It remains unclear at what point we can say Bosnia and Herzegovina is irreversibly on course for Euro-Atlantic integration.

On the positive side, as I mentioned, the country submitted its membership application with the European Union. Associated with this, the authorities also took steps to implement a Reform Agenda, including the adoption of new labour legislation in both entities.

In this context, I would like to praise the significant efforts of the European Union Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lars Gunnar Wigemark. He really went the extra mile.

While the progress achieved by the authorities on the reform agenda is indeed very welcome, let us not lose sight of the need to accelerate the pace of reform. There must be much more urgency in the decision-making process.

From the point of view of my mandate to uphold the Peace Agreement, I welcome the fact that the authorities in the Republika Srpska have not taken further steps to implement a referendum on the authority of the state court and prosecutor's office and on the authorities of the High Representative, as this would be a clear violation of the Peace Agreement. This step is indeed welcome.

My current assessment is that although the referendum has still not been officially withdrawn, it does appear to have been put aside. I must note, however, that various political actors have continued to advocate the organization of yet another entity referendum on the validity of a recent decision by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this context I need to stress that the Peace Agreement explicitly states that the court's decisions are

final and binding.

In addition to efforts made to meet European Union requirements, I would like to commend the efforts of the authorities to register military properties to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a condition for the activation of a NATO Membership Action Plan and one of the prerequisites set by my Steering Board for the closure of OHR.

I call on Republika Srpska authorities to enable the registration of such properties located on the territory of that entity, as the Federation has been doing. If Republika Srpska authorities are as keen to see the closure of my Office as they repeatedly state, then they need to deliver the results needed to enable the PIC Steering Board to take that decision.

Another largely positive factor has been the regional situation. Serbian Prime Minister Vucic's high profile commitment of notable donor funds to Srebrenica did much to foster reconciliation; He personally visited Srebrenica twice. There was also a very important first session of the two governments, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of the Republic of Serbia in November. This was indeed a very welcome and positive step forward. A similar joint session with the Croatian government has been announced, and is also a positive development.

In the broader region, a decision was taken a few days ago by the Presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Turkey in Zagreb to reinvigorate the process of trilateral meetings between these countries. I take this opportunity to encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbours to significantly increase the level of state to state cooperation, to the benefit of all sides.

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Despite these positive developments, the forward momentum they

created was diminished, regrettably, by a number of parallel developments during the reporting period.

The readiness of some political actors to question and challenge the Peace Agreement, including new attempts to undermine the sovereignty and authority of the state and its institutions, continues to cast a shadow over positive efforts to advance economic and social reforms.

Sharply divergent reactions to the verdict of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the case of wartime Republika Srpska President Radovan Karadzic, highlighted the need for greater efforts towards reconciliation.

I was deeply shocked by the high-profile opening by the current Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik of a dormitory named after Karadzic only two days before his first instance conviction for genocide and crimes against humanity. In our countries it would be unthinkable to glorify individuals convicted of committing mass atrocities. With this act, the RS President sent an insidious message to those affected by the horror and trauma of wartime ethnic cleansing, and put himself outside the standards and morality of the civilized world.

I also take this opportunity to clearly reject his thesis that fairness in transitional justice means equal numbers of war criminals being prosecuted from different ethnic groups. Indeed, we must seek justice for all of the individual innocent victims – every victim is a victim, and has parents and relatives. But applying a principle of ethnic parity to mass graves or war criminals would do a disservice to victims and survivors of all nationalities.

The passing of time brings new challenges to all of us, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is no different. A terrorism-inspired act carried out by a single attacker in Sarajevo on 18

November resulted in the death of two soldiers of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attack once again highlighted the challenge facing the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fight against terrorism.

An additional issue of concern is the participation of some citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in foreign conflicts, some of whom have returned and could present a threat for the future stability of the country.

Additionally, incidents continue to occur which threaten to undermine inter-ethnic relations. For example, processions organized in March in Srebrenica and other municipalities by supporters of Vojislav Seselj to celebrate his first-instance not-guilty verdict raised fear among Bosniak returnees who are still trying to come to terms with the crimes of the past.

Other direct challenges to the Peace Agreement during the reporting period included the Republika Srpska government concluding in December that the entity's institutions would cease cooperating with SIPA, a state-level police agency, over a legally authorized raid on a police station in the Republika Srpska in relation to a war crimes investigation.

While the Republika Srpska authorities eventually resumed operational cooperation under a signed agreement, this apparent interference of politics into police work is unacceptable, particularly at a time when agencies need to be strengthening their cooperation.

The continued policy by representatives of the ruling party in the Republika Srpska, in particular its President, to advocate for the secession of that entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina troubles me deeply and raises fundamental questions about the commitment of some officials and political parties to fully respect the Peace Agreement. In this context I remain concerned that this party's official platform includes a threat to organize an independence referendum in 2018 if

certain conditions are not met.

I use this platform to say once again: the Peace Agreement does not grant the Entities the right to secede, and any attempt to change the Peace Agreement requires the agreement of all the parties.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my last report to you and again today, I described the opportunity provided to Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders by the European Union and how critical it is for them to demonstrate that they are ready and able to deliver on the reform agendas they have set for themselves, while also fully respecting the Peace Agreement.

This opportunity must now be embraced with both hands. What this means in practice is an acceleration of concrete results. When I next report to you in six months' time, I sincerely hope that the authorities will have undertaken this challenge with greater urgency. Therefore let us together issue a challenge for the authorities to deliver the following:

- Publication of the 2013 census results;
- Final agreement on the EU coordination mechanism;
- Full implementation of decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the rulings on the Mostar elections, State Property and the 9 January Day in the Republika Srpska;
- Measurable progress in fiscal and economic reforms, including meeting the outstanding requirements set by the IMF for a new arrangement;
- And real progress on implementing the outstanding requirements for closure of the OHR.

For this to happen, political leaders will need to stop linking issues into ever more complex and out-of-reach packages, and put the needs of citizens first.

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In conclusion, 2016 can be a year of progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration, economic growth and job creation, but only if the country pulls together and works as one. Questioning and challenging the fundamentals of the Peace Agreement is not a formula for success.

Given the complex environment that continues to prevail in the country, the presence of the EUFOR military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina with an executive mandate remains of vital importance, enabling my Office and others in the international community to fulfill our respective mandates as well as reassuring citizens from all ethnic groups throughout the country of a safe and secure environment.

I very much hope that in six months I will be able to report to you – my distinguished colleagues – a marked improvement based on the delivery of concrete results and a situation where there is full respect for the Peace Agreement.

This is the surest way forward for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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I would like to conclude today with some positive news, which offers encouragement in our efforts to ensure sustainable stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also highlights the challenges. The first is the very small, even trivial example, but one of wider symbolic significance. Only a few days ago, several local associations agreed to create a single karate association for the whole country at state level. But even this small step required twenty years of efforts towards reaching this goal.

The second piece of news is of great significance. This weekend, the splendid Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka, demolished in the war together with 15 other mosques in the city, will be reopened. This will be an event of wider significance for reconciliation and tolerance in the region and beyond. A huge number of honorary guests are expected, from BiH, Croatia, Serbia, Turkey and elsewhere. A very special moment not only for Banja Luka, but also for human kind as a whole.

On this positive note, I would like to thank you for your attention and continued support for Bosnia and Herzegovina.