

Press Conference following the session of the PIC Steering Board

Check against delivery

High Representative Valentin Inzko

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It took a little bit longer today. To tell you frankly, this was because of one paragraph which concerns NATO, and the future of BiH in NATO. The Russian Federation could not associate itself with this paragraph. They will issue a separate statement.

You will also see in the Communiqué that it was the wish of Bosnia and Herzegovina – it was a decision taken in 2009, and a letter was handed over to NATO in 2010 which had the agreement of Presidency member Radmanović. So this was a consensual decision.

My deputy and I will inform you in more detail about the issues that have been discussed at this session of the PIC Steering Board.

Firstly, we are welcoming the application letter of 15th of February. Some members regretted that not much progress has been achieved after the 16th of February, but it was a very important step for Bosnia and Herzegovina because BiH has decided about its direction. The speed is another issue, but it has decided about direction, and the direction is a European one. There is no way back. It is a point of no return. Likewise, Bosnia and Herzegovina has decided with this letter from 2010 about the NATO Membership Action Plan, so we have a decision about the direction.

Nonetheless, the PIC SB underlined the significance of the step taken towards the EU and called upon all leaders in BiH to proceed with the required reforms – socioeconomic, rule of law, justice and public administration, which should be carried out in line with citizens' demands and in cooperation with the institutions and civil society.

As I said, in order to unlock further progress towards the EU, we need to see concrete results – not only programs and procedures, but real progress. The social and economic challenges facing the country can be resolved only through an accelerated and deep reform. This was stressed by many members of the PIC, urgency is of essence.

You know that there are different figures on how many people have left BiH. Some say 15,000 a year, some say 40,000 last year; I heard a figure of 80,000 in two years. But in any case, it is a tragedy if a single citizen leaves, let alone thousands. There is also a so-called brain-drain index – an index of how many young people decide to leave a country. In this brain-drain index, out of 140 countries in the world, BiH is 136th. So you can see how many young people are leaving this country. Even statistically it is proven. Needless to say, all these young people are very successful abroad. You know many examples yourselves.

The PIC SB discussed the successful negotiations between the IMF and BiH authorities on an agreement to launch reforms aimed at maintaining fiscal, economic and financial stability, and at spurring continued infrastructure development and job creation.

This program should also facilitate implementation of some of the reforms considered by the EU to be necessary to assist BiH on its path to EU accession and the Steering Board called on the BiH authorities to honor their commitments to the IMF.

On a less positive note, the PIC SB also discussed the fact that so many resolvable issues have remained open for so many years. This has to change. Additional efforts by all relevant stakeholders must be made in order to find solutions for outstanding issues. I also don't need to repeat these issues. Some are quite trivial, technical. 8 years already we don't have a gas regulatory agency at the state level, we have been waiting for implementation of the Sejdić-Finci ruling for six or seven years, and if elections are not held in Mostar, we will have 12 years without elections. Also there was this call for urgency.

The PIC Steering Board called on the competent authorities to urgently put in place a solution to fund the Public

Broadcasting System which ensures a single method across BiH for the entire PBS system and which secures the PBS' financial sustainability and independence. I have just heard that the European Championship will be transmitted on BHT, so we will have some extension and there will be no interruption of broadcasting. But it is surely regretful that a single method has not been found for collecting fees and financing the public broadcasting. You are aware that many methods exist. Sometimes fees are paid with telephone bills; others are collecting them with electricity. In Zagreb, retired senior citizens are going from door to door. The collection rate is very high there, 85%. But, of course, the government has to urgently take a decision and find the best solution.

There is another issue which – if unresolved – will have a deep impact on the future generations of this country. Education is an incredibly important sphere where we continue to see far too much time wasted on using the school system as a way to accentuate differences and exclude those who are different, and far too little effort spent on working to improve the quality and inclusiveness of education. Some PIC members also mentioned a good example between France and Germany. Others mentioned the Erasmus program which brought young people together in the European Union. And more effort should be paid and undertaken on the education field which is also the field of reconciliation. You cannot have good education if you do not have enough reconciliation efforts.

Another issue was negative and divisive rhetoric and policies. The PIC SB regretted this development, and the fact that a lot of energy is spent on diversions with negative and divisive rhetoric from urgently needed reforms that would create economic opportunities for all. In particular, it is wholly inappropriate for leaders on any side to praise or celebrate war criminals. We have seen streets named after war criminals in Herzegovina, and of course the student dormitory in Pale named after Radovan Karadžić. This celebration and glorification of war criminals is completely unacceptable.

Another issue which several delegations highlighted is the pervasive corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is so dramatically impeding the country's social, economic and political development. The country's leaders and competent authorities must move to protect and advance the rule of law and to prevent and fight corruption and organized crime in BiH.

The judicial institutions of this country are too often subject to political influence, and the PIC SB reiterated its full support for the development and strengthening of independent, efficient, impartial and professional judicial, prosecutorial and law enforcement institutions throughout BiH.

These institutions need to work even harder to investigate and prosecute corruption, especially at high levels, and to implement court decisions at all levels, without further delay.

Now, I'm going to hand you over now to my deputy, who will inform you about the part of the discussion that dealt with other important issues, foremost the October local elections and the situation in Mostar.

Principal Deputy High Representative Bruce G. Berton

Thank you, High Representative

Now, as you all know, elections are to take place in October this year. Therefore, the PIC SB met today with the representatives of the BiH Central Election Commission and "Pod Lupom" coalition for free and fair elections in order to get an update on the preparations for holding and monitoring of the elections.

Regarding the upcoming elections, I want to take this opportunity to express the strong support of the OHR and the international community for the important work being done by civil society and "Pod Lupom" in particular and all of its thousands of volunteers to monitor the integrity of the electoral process and contribute to democracy in this country.

The Central Election Commission also has our strong support, and I call on political actors to support the CEC in its efforts to ensure that elections are held in line with international standards.

With the local elections coming in a few months, citizens will have the opportunity again to decide on the future of this country, and I call on them to exercise this opportunity by voting on 2 October.

Speaking about local elections, the issue of Mostar remains unresolved. The PIC SB called upon the responsible political leaders to reach agreement in line with the ruling of the 2010 BiH Constitutional Court to allow voters in

Mostar to cast their ballots alongside all other voters in the 2 October local elections in BiH.

It is no secret that the two parties with the greatest responsibility to finally resolve the electoral issue in Mostar are the HDZ BiH and the SDA.

The PIC reaffirmed the core principle that 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.

As the High Representative indicated, it is simply unacceptable that party leaders consider issues like the distribution of seats in public companies more worthy of their attention than correcting the 8 year long denial of Mostarians this most basic human right. This shouldn't be treated as a normal situation.

I also have to express my gratitude to the Central Election Commission for keeping a window open so that elections can be held in Mostar if an agreement is reached in time. But I have to emphasize also that we are running out of time. The CEC needs time to be able to organize elections, and that is about 90 days. If you backtrack from October 2nd, that leaves us with less than 30 days to figure this out.

The fact that 2016 is election year has become rather obvious in BiH's public space. Instead of coming together, and reach compromises and solutions that would take country forward, political actors too often choose to use aggressive rhetoric which needlessly raises tensions and deepen divisions.

Also, the PIC SB voiced its concern over the threats of radicalisation in BiH. Welcoming both the BiH authorities' efforts to counter radicalism and the positive initiatives launched by the Islamic Community of BiH, the PIC SB encouraged the relevant authorities in BiH at all levels to continue efforts to tackle these threats through improved cooperation, both internally and with the international community.

You've heard the hr mention corruption. In BiH that remains a serious problem, and it impedes the country's social, economic, and political development. The PIC SB called upon leaders and competent authorities to redouble their efforts to protect and advance the rule of law and to prevent and fight corruption and organized crime in BiH. They reiterated their full support to the development of independent, efficient, impartial, and professional judicial, prosecutorial and law enforcement institutions throughout this country. They urge these institutions to investigate and prosecute corruption, especially at the highest level, and to implement court decisions at all levels without any further delay.

Allow me to conclude by saying that the PIC Steering Board has reaffirmed its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity and fundamental structure of BiH as a single, sovereign state comprising of two entities.

Also, the PIC Steering Board reiterated its full support for the High Representative in ensuring complete respect of the GFAP and carrying out his mandate under Annex 10 and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions which remains unchanged.