



## **Press Conference following the session of the PIC Steering Board**

*Check against delivery.*

### **High Representative Valentin Inzko**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome.

This time, we did not keep you waiting and I am glad that is the case. As always, copies of the communique will be available to you and you can take them after we finish with the presser.

As is customary, my deputy and I will brief you on the session of the political directors of the PIC Steering Board that just finished couple of hours ago.

I am pleased to say that there was a high-level of consensus on the text of the Communique, although, unfortunately, the Russian Federation provided a footnote to one of the paragraphs with which it could not agree.

It would not be surprising to you if I say that we had plenty to discuss over the last two days as the six months since our last meeting in June have been quite eventful. I would emphasize a few of the issues, which were a part of our discussion over the last two days.

To begin with, the first paragraph of the Communique states very clearly and unanimously the PIC's unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, as well as its full support for the mandate of the High Representative. It reminds all parties of their obligation to comply with the Peace Agreement, and reiterates that the international Community retains the necessary instruments to uphold the Agreement.

Looking at recent developments, one conclusion was obvious to most of the delegations: there are still two political realities in BiH, a positive and a negative one.

On the one hand, the country has made some extremely positive steps on its EU integration path and that has

been noted also by the PIC. The PIC at the same time called upon the leadership in BiH to accelerate the implementation of the Reform Agenda.

On the other hand, significant challenges remain to the functionality and stability of the country, including challenges to the Dayton Agreement and the PIC SB remained concerned over these challenges.

The RS referendum of 25 September was of course discussed in this context. The overwhelming majority of members saw the holding of a referendum against decisions of the constitutional court as a fundamental question of the rule of law. And they were extremely concerned about the idea that some authorities would assert that court decisions can be denied or overturned by political decisions.

The PIC noted of the annulment by the BiH Constitutional Court of the results of the referendum and called for full respect for the BiH Constitutional Court decision on the RS Law on Holidays.

The Steering Board was of the view that all BiH's leaders must contribute to political stability – by avoiding challenges to Dayton and by resolving disputes through dialogue.

Another issue, discussed was the October local elections. In this context, the fact that elections were not held in Mostar was seen as a basic failure of the responsible parties to meet democratic standards and ensure citizens in Mostar the basic right to vote.

The PIC SB deplored the failure of the political parties, in particular the HDZ and the SDA, to reach agreement on Mostar. In our meeting with the Presidency, we received some encouragement from President Covic and President Izetbegovic that Mostar could be resolved soon, and we expect them to honor this commitment.

With regard to Stolac, the unanimous view of the PIC SB is that the Central Election Commission needs to take a decision on the re-run of elections in Stolac without further delay. Here, I would also like to add that the decision of the Court of BiH on Stolac will need to be respected. It is an imperative that the situation in Stolac remains calm.

Also, the elected representatives in those municipalities and cities across BiH who have not already constituted their authorities need to do so as soon as possible. All municipal authorities need to work for the benefit of all citizens irrespective of their ethnic or religious background.

Another issue discussed with the Presidency and reflected in the Communique is the long blockage in the work of the Federation parliament due to disputes over certain legislative proposals.

Again, we were encouraged by assurances from President Covic that these problems would be resolved soon, and we expect the coalition parties in the Federation to make good on this promise and get to work addressing the many priorities and problems facing citizens.

Before I turn you to my deputy, Bruce Berton, allow me to draw your attention to another issue that was highlighted at our session: reconciliation.

It is our firm belief that all political, social and religious leaders in BiH need to advance mutual understanding and tolerance.

They should refrain from negative and divisive policies, actions and rhetoric, as well as historical revisionism and the provocative use of symbols, which can have a radicalising effect on individuals and communities.

Now, Bruce will inform you about the rest of the discussion over the last two days.

### **Principal Deputy High Representative Bruce G. Berton**

Thank you, High Representative.

You might remember, from the June session of PIC that several delegations highlighted the problem of pervasive corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which impedes country's social, economic and political development.

With that in mind, during our deliberations we have invited several NGOs to present their views of the situation in BiH, including the problem of corruption.

In their presentations they covered the political and economic situation, including the problem of corruption in this country. Their presentations gave a sobering assessment, about the pervasive corruption present in this country. We heard about how laws are adopted and institutions are formed to give the appearance of addressing the problem, while in reality much of the serious work to fight corruption remains unimplemented. This is clearly a failure on the part of the domestic authorities.

It was important for the PIC to hear an honest assessment about the problems in BiH, but it would be even more important for their voices to be heard by the political and institutional leaders of BiH, which are the right address for resolving such problems.

A stable political situation, rule of law and readiness to reform are crucial for the economic prosperity of every country.

BiH needs a political class, which is genuinely committed to these goals. It needs politicians prepared to put aside their own interests for the benefit and welfare of the citizens of BiH.

The European Union has gone to great lengths to extend a hand to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the decision by the Union to bring the country into a new phase with the handing out of the EU questionnaire later this week is welcome and positive news.

Now it will be up to the elected leadership of this country to take the next step. To do so successfully, they will need to focus on making the political system work, and to refrain from divisive rhetoric that can only serve to hold the country back.

As the High Representative said, copies of the communique are available to you and now we will be happy to answer your questions.