



Statement by the High Representative, Valentin Inzko, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement

Dear citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Twenty-five years have passed since the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country today faces formidable challenges, but as we address these challenges, let us not forget that Dayton has kept the peace.

And peace has to be cherished, especially if we keep in mind the conflicts in the Middle East, the Caucasus, or the refugee crisis.

But peace is not the end, but a starting point, or as the late High Representative Paddy Ashdown said, “Dayton is the floor, not the ceiling.” It is the foundation for the country we are working to build and upgrade together.

Peace has made it possible to move forward, even though we are moving much more slowly than citizens have a right to expect.

In the first decade after Dayton, hundreds of thousands of citizens were able to return to their homes, the Convertible Mark was successfully introduced, – one of the most stable currencies in Europe – along with biometric passports and ID cards, common licence plates, and the flag and the anthem.

An indirect tax system – far ahead of anything in the region – was created, and the police and judicial system were reformed. The BiH Armed Forces were established and have distinguished themselves in flood relief and other activities at home as well as serving in international peacekeeping deployments around the world.

And the Office of the High Representative was a major driver of these reforms. The Bonn Powers – granted to OHR in 1997 so that it could fully implement its Dayton mandate – were essential and effective during the first phase of recovery.

They were deployed judiciously by my predecessors to provide Bosnia and Herzegovina with the institutional and legal infrastructure required to function as a modern democracy.

On this, 25th anniversary, I want to pay tribute to my predecessors, Carl Bildt, Carlos Westendorp, Wolfgang

Petritsch, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, Miroslav Lajcak and, of course, the late Paddy Ashdown, for the work they did on behalf of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These people of Bosnia and Herzegovina demanded – and continue to demand – the right to live in a society that respects all citizens, that provides schools and good hospitals and public amenities, and offers decent jobs and economic opportunities. Time and again, the impetus for positive change has come not in the first instance from political leaders but the people themselves.

The families of those who were killed or went missing in the war came together from every community for a common cause, to ensure that their loved ones are remembered with dignity and with respect. The families of those who have suffered because of corruption and inefficiency have come together in citizens' initiatives to demand accountability.

Yet, the pace of progress has slowed almost to a halt, and people – especially young people – are leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are moving to countries that provide economic opportunity under and the rule of law, good governance, and normal life. The International Community is working – and will continue to work – to end impunity for those in Bosnia and Herzegovina who are violent or powerful or both, and to strengthen the institutions that protect citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, to sum up,

I believe the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina want to set a new course.

I believe they can succeed with robust and consistent support from international partners.

Change can be delivered even within the Dayton system.

Dayton gives no one the right to challenge the country or its people. It gives every citizen the right to build a decent life with dignity and security.

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be confident that their partners in the International Community will stand with them as they move steadily and resolutely along this road.

This road can and ought to be more decisive than in the past decade, and it should encompass the successful elements from the first ten years which saw the state, the entities and the cantons progress the fastest.

Which is why I am convinced that in 2021 we can open a new and more successful chapter in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the interest of all, and especially in the interest of the wonderful people of this country.