



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

Check against delivery.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

It is my sincere honour to address this distinguished body once again. Having in mind that this may very well be my last address as High Representative before the Security Council, I regret that we are unable to meet in person, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to wreak havoc in much of the world. As always, I hope all of you and your respective countries and citizens are doing well.

I extend my sincere condolences to the representative from India for the situation your country currently faces. With vaccines slowly becoming more widely available, I hope that there is some light at the end of the tunnel for you, and for all of us. I am pleased to inform you that today, a few hours ago, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi and Austrian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Schallenberg were in Sarajevo to deliver vaccines. Austria was instrumental in the logistic legwork, which made this delivery today possible.

When I arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2009, the international community was entering a new phase of engagement, in which it emphasized local ownership over international intervention. Local ownership is a great ideal, but with ownership comes responsibility, and the level of discourse today in Bosnia and Herzegovina could politely be described as irresponsible.

Last year, 2020, was a year of hope and reflection for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country marked 25 years of peace as a result of the General Framework Agreement for Peace, initialled on 21 November 1995 in Dayton, Ohio, and signed on 14 December 1995 in Paris. It was a time for reflection on the achievements, as well as the shortcomings, of the ensuing two and a half decades, while also looking towards the future.

This is reflected in the joint statement of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina which read in part, "Today is a unique opportunity to send a message to rightly underline the importance of strengthening trust, peace and mutual respect among all peoples and citizens."

On this occasion, best wishes were also delivered to Bosnia and Herzegovina from former US President Clinton, the presidents of Austria and Slovenia, the UN Secretary General, the Prime Minister of Spain, the foreign ministers of Germany and France, and a large number of dignitaries.

Respected Council members,

As laid out in my report, as part of a longstanding policy of challenging the fundamentals of the GFAP, the Republika Srpska authorities – led by Milorad Dodik – adopted a set of concrete conclusions in this regard in March. As I reported, these conclusions envisage discussions among domestic political actors on the future of BiH, leaving open the option for the so-called “peaceful dissolution” of the country.

There is no real need to explain the destructive long-term policy of the current RS authorities, as it was explained to this very body by Mr. Dodik in the Arria format meeting last year in November. I believe it was clear to everyone what kind of irrational, destructive policy and mindset we are dealing with. You will recall, he called me a “monster” and the late Lord Ashdown “a criminal.”

Only yesterday, Mr. Dodik was again in the media, claiming he recently told a foreign diplomat that peaceful dissolution is the only option that is bound to happen anyway and that the diplomat had “nothing against it.” If you or I or anyone else stood up and said we want to split up our own country, we would be called traitors, secessionists, or seditionists, and possibly arrested. To put in blunt terms: it is unthinkable in our countries, that a president wants to destroy the very country of which he is president.

Furthermore, Mr. Dodik’s party, the SNSD, recently posted several videos as part of an online campaign promoting “peaceful dissolution,” which will also run as advertisements to YouTube viewers in BiH.

In April, leaders of the Republika Srpska ruling coalition parties met and Mr. Dodik announced that the RS would form teams for negotiating. It was clear that, if the direction and outcome of such discussions are not to the Republika Srpska authorities’ liking, the Republika Srpska, quote: “reserves the right to finally decide on its future status,” unquote.

As to be expected, these developments have stirred up the Federation-based parties, particularly the Bosniak parties, most of which dismissed the possibility of “peaceful dissolution” and some of which predicted a war in case the Republika Srpska attempts to secede from BiH.

As High Representative, I want to be clear: Dayton does not give the right to entities to secede.

So, once again, the political atmosphere is poisoned and progress on reforms is sidelined. And it is extremely unfortunate that the Republika Srpska authorities have chosen this moment when the entire country is still in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also the moment, when the Republika Srpska authorities had to borrow 300 million Euros via a bond sale on the London Stock Exchange to cover its budget deficit, because they would not accept the easy money and reforms proposed by the IMF.

During my mandate as High Representative, we have seen the goalposts move – shifts in the red line of what the IC is willing to accept. We have seen a shift from rhetoric to action challenging the State competences, institutions and decisions, and we are now also witnessing a shift from rhetoric to action challenging the State sovereignty and territorial integrity, and, with this, the peace implementation process in BiH.

To be clear, there is now a concerted effort to formalize and implement the conclusions adopted by the RS National Assembly. At best, the goal is to roll back many reform achievements of the last 25 years, which threatens the State, its competences and institutions, and their ability to take and enforce decisions.

This would impact ongoing reforms, including those covered by the 14 EU priorities, many of which build on reforms brought about by High Representative interventions.

Let us also be clear, even if it is a best-case scenario, the aim is a perpetually dysfunctional BiH, which we already see in the near-paralysis of the highest institutions of BiH, including the Presidency, the Council of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly – not to mention in the Federation, which SNSD's partners HDZ BiH have succeeded in grinding to a halt. This will have negative consequences for the Western Balkans region and the rest of Europe, as a debilitated BiH is not in the position to effectively deal with the challenges of organized crime and corruption, migration, climate change, etc.

If such negative trends continue, the question for the international community will soon be: How long can this kind of destructive behaviour be tolerated, and how long can Mr. Dodik and his allies in the RS and elsewhere be regarded as partners?

On the other hand, we have seen movement around the electoral reform process, which has been at a stalemate for years. It could be an opportunity to tackle a key longstanding set of rights-based reforms, including removing the discrimination identified in rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, while also improving the transparency of the election process.

Unfortunately, there is fear and mistrust among citizens and civil society that the international community in BiH would seek to appease demands to further “ethnicize” the electoral system. This concept of “ethno-democracy” would certainly conflict not only with the implementation of the “Sejdic and Finci” group of cases, but also with the specific goals of the GFAP, including the overall aim of the Agreement to reestablish the multiethnic society that existed prior to the war.

I must reiterate that we must not allow this process to lead to further ethnic or territorial divisions. This would have far-reaching consequences.

Apart from the implementation of Sejdic-Finci and related decisions, the priority should be the implementation of ODIHR and GRECO recommendations, which would not only eradicate discrimination but also increase transparency and prevent electoral fraud.

Distinguished members of the Council,

When I last addressed you in November, I repeated my call on the RS authorities to remove the plaque dedicated to convicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic from the student dormitory in Pale. I am pleased to report that this plaque was officially taken down in December. On 27 January I addressed a letter to the Speaker of the RSNA asking the RSNA to rescind within three months decorations awarded in 2016 to three convicted war criminals, among them Radovan Karadzic. The three months passed in April, and I have received no formal response, nor have the decorations been rescinded. The RSNA was to discuss this issue on 28 April but postponed it. We will see what happens, but for now, I am informing you the situation is not rectified.

And the behaviour of political leaders most unfortunately encourages similar behaviour among ordinary people. In addition to some examples mentioned in my report, just in the last few weeks, a huge mural of convicted war criminal Ratko Mladic appeared in the RS town of Foca, which is well-known as a place where unspeakable war crimes occurred.

In the absence of more responsible behaviour, this again points to the need for the criminalization of the glorification of war criminals as well as genocide denial. In any case, here I would again recall the European Commission Opinion on BiH's EU membership application, which unequivocally states, “Revisionism and genocide denial contradict the most fundamental European values.”

There are some areas where I remain hopeful, such as the case of Mostar. After 12 years, the City of Mostar finally held local elections, ultimately electing a new mayor, Dr. Mario Kordic, whom I have met and am impressed with his energy and enthusiasm. So far, there seems to be a great amount of goodwill in the new City Council, and I am confident they will make an honest effort to address the many issues that have accumulated over all the years without a City Council. In connection with Mostar, I would like to particularly emphasize the mediation efforts of US

Ambassador Eric Nelson and EU Special Representative Johann Sattler.

I should also note that the Sarajevo City Council also recently elected a new mayor, a young and enthusiastic lady whom I recently met, Benjamina Karic, from a multicultural family. And citizens in Banja Luka directly elected a new mayor, a member of the RS opposition, Drasko Stanivukovic, aged 27, who so far as taken a transparent approach to his work.

Respected members of the Security Council,

The 7th of December 2020 marked the 50th anniversary of the so-called “Warsaw genuflection” where in World War II thousands of Jews lost their lives under their German oppressors. This was a historical and astonishing act of atonement.

This is what leaders look like, and what is sorely needed in BiH today. In this context, I would like to call on the BiH Presidency to live up to their statement from the 25th anniversary of the GFAP and in 2021 to organize and participate in a joint commemoration for all victims of the war in BiH. I believe such an act would be healing for all citizens of BiH, and even among the Presidency members themselves.

I note once again that, while Mandelas might not be in politics, there are hundreds of Mandelas in BiH among ordinary people.

Honoured members of the Council,

In my previous address in November, I urged the BiH authorities to implement the third National Action Plan of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which runs until 2022. In this regard, in January some brave activists launched “Nisam tražila,” a domestic Me Too movement that inspired thousands of women and girls to come forward with statements of abuse and violence. I urge authorities to tackle sexual violence head-on, prosecute perpetrators and step up support to survivors.

Here, I would like to note the many Bosnian women refugees who have ascended to a prominent political office outside the country, including Austrian Minister of Justice Dr. Alma Zadic, the Right Honorable Baroness Arminka Helic in the UK House of Lords, Hannah Sumeja Atic, member of the Norwegian Prime Minister’s cabinet, former Swedish Minister of Higher and Secondary Education Aida Hadzialic, Mayor of Kalmar, Sweden Dzenita Albaza.

This affirms that Bosnia and Herzegovina’s greatest asset is its human potential. The women I mentioned fled the country in a time of war. Now, young, educated people are leaving the country not because of the economy, but because of nepotism and corruption, a general lack of the rule of law, and increasingly due to political instability.

Distinguished members of the Security Council, to conclude!

It is possible that this is my last address to you as High Representative. So, I want to use the opportunity to reflect on some of the lessons of the last 12 years.

Living and working in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been one of the great pleasures of my life. By and large, the people are among the nicest and most caring I have ever met. Neighbours look after neighbours. It is certainly not the case that people cannot live together, this is absolutely not true, but the politicians spend too much time emphasizing what divides them rather than what unites them.

Today, I would have hoped that I could declare the job completed. Unfortunately, and much to my regret, BiH remains *de facto* a frozen conflict with unfinished peace, where political leaders continue to pursue wartime goals, generate divisive narratives and nationalistic political agendas and speak about dissolution of the state. The multiethnic and diverse society that existed prior to the conflict has all but disappeared, while it is becoming more difficult to defend the preservation of multiethnic spaces and resist the creation of mono-ethnic ones. Hate speech, the glorification of war criminals, and revisionism or outright genocide denial, despite the verdicts of international

judicial bodies, remain very common in the political discourse.

As I said at the outset, when I arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina as High Representative in 2009, the mantra was “local ownership.” With only a very few exceptions quite early on, we have tried that, and it isn’t working. Here we are a dozen years later talking about “peaceful dissolution.” Bosnia and Herzegovina should be firmly on the EU path, but here we are today and one of its political leaders is openly advocating dividing the country, disparaging and mocking the EU in the process.

We have had a period of robust interventionism – which has garnered some criticism, but let’s be honest, helped to propel Bosnia and Herzegovina a long way on its path – and we also had a longer period of local ownership during which a step forward has often been followed by two steps back. Perhaps it is time to consider a different approach, somewhere in the middle. In any case, the international community needs to take a decisive stand to stop such centrifugal tendencies, which are taking the country further into a downward spiral, which could have political and security implications not only for the country, but also the region, and the rest of Europe.

Until there is a genuine, demonstrated commitment to peace and stability, and the durable stability and inviolability of BiH are irreversibly ensured, the international community must retain all the instruments at its disposal to address any potential threat, including the executive powers of the High Representative – which I did not use for almost ten years – the maintenance of international judges in BiH Constitutional Court, the international mechanisms in Brcko District, and the international military presence in BiH.

Personally, I have the impression that we are far from a situation that would allow changes to the post-Dayton arrangement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead of rushing to a decision, we should come to terms with the fact that peace and stabilization take time. This was also the opinion of Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, who, as the EU Presidency Country in 2009 supported my candidacy, the candidacy of Austria. He said to me: “We must have a long-term approach to Bosnia Herzegovina!” How right he was. We should also acknowledge that the pace of progress has slowed because we decided to change our robust approach to BiH too quickly.

I am increasingly inclined to believe that the current postwar political elite, with notable exceptions, mostly alienated from reality, is neither ready nor equipped to deal with contemporary challenges and address the real needs of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And I tend to believe that they are not our genuine partners in moving the country forward. We, therefore, need to find a way to deal with them in a firmer way and at the same time move past them – also by finding new partners.

The good news is that there are progressive forces in BiH with whom we can partner, who want to normalize their country. History shows we can be incredibly successful – let us not forget that in 2005 BiH was the poster boy for post-conflict resolution: a country delivering structural reforms and advancing towards constitutional change. If we were able to forge a single army from three armies that fought each other a decade earlier, we can certainly do what remains to be done.

Ladies and gentlemen, But I must be blunt. Both the international community and progressive actors in BiH are making a fundamental mistake if they assume that things will somehow work out because time is working in our favour. This is a fundamental mistake as long as the forces of disintegration are stronger than those of reintegration. For time to be on our side, we must get back to a dynamic of reform and reintegration.

I would like to thank you for your cooperation and attention for all these years.