



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

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

A month ago the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina went to the polls for their seventh postwar general elections.

They did so just one year away from the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement and against the background of ever deepening stagnation and socio-economic hardship. Whether you read my report, the EU's latest progress report or the reporting of Bosnian non-governmental organizations monitoring the performance of Government, the results of the last four years fell way short of the mark.

As if all this was not enough, only a few months earlier we witnessed close to a million people being affected by tragic and catastrophic floods, the like of which cannot be recalled in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And here I must pause for a moment to acknowledge the tremendous role played by the United Nations and its representative on the ground, in terms of coordination and information-sharing throughout the flood relief efforts.

The scenes I saw when I visited the flood victims, days after the heavy rains that swept the country, were truly shocking. However, a ray of hope in this disaster was the instinctive readiness of local communities and thousands of ordinary people to help each other regardless of ethnicity.

Regrettably, the parties, officials and institutions governing the country at various levels have not responded to the country's problems with the same spontaneous urgency and creativity with which everyday people responded to the floods. And this is why Bosnia and Herzegovina has been on a downward trajectory since 2006. Eight years is a long time for any country to be going the wrong way.

Not surprisingly, there is a plentiful supply of disillusion, anger and frustration. This is particularly worrying among youth, for whom unemployment levels are above 57% percent, among the highest rates of unemployment for young people in Europe. These young people, the future of the country, have been particularly let down.

The situation is not good. It must be tackled head on.

So, clearly, these elections are not just another round of general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These elections are about a decisive four-year period ahead for all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or in which part of the country they live.

There must now be a fundamental change – the interests of the country and its citizens must be put before those of a privileged political class.

The good news is that we have a chance to turn over a new leaf.

The start of a new mandate provides us with a timely opportunity to start afresh, a chance that cannot be wasted, to take major strides toward the lasting peace and stability that come with Euro-Atlantic integration.

The integration of the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, into the European Union is about so much more than prosperity and raising standards. It is about healing the wounds of the past and enabling the peoples of the region to once again live together with their compatriots without borders. This is certainly my great wish for the peoples of the region and I know it is shared by many.

Political leaders should be in no doubt whatsoever that business as usual simply won't be acceptable.

We have expectations and we expect to see complacency replaced with a sense of urgency.

The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the International Community are in full unison on one very simply point: we expect a fundamental change in the way that politics is conducted.

And such a change of approach is absolutely possible.

But what do we need to see in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the days and weeks and months ahead of us to move in that direction?

Overall, we expect the needs of citizens to be tackled head on and for the country to be put back on track for Euro-Atlantic integration, the declared strategic objective of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Steps need to be taken urgently by the incoming authorities to overhaul the business environment so that new jobs can be created in the private sector. Let me take this opportunity to say once again that I fully support the EU's "Compact for Growth" initiative.

Progress on Euro-Atlantic integration has to be unblocked.

In this regard, I welcome the initiative announced last week by the United Kingdom and Germany to define a roadmap of reform to strengthen Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions and accelerate the country's progress towards the EU. I cannot stress strongly enough – it is vitally important that the incoming authorities seize this new opportunity.

From the parties that ran in the recent elections, the first thing that we need to see now is the speedy formation of governments in a manner that is in accordance with the law, unlike what we saw in 2010.

I have also challenged the authorities to appoint more women and to seek out ministerial candidates and other appointees who have the expertise – in particular in economics – to deliver the progress that is required. This can easily be done if there is a minimum of political will.

Similarly the effort that has been put into blocking progress on issues, especially at the State-level, must now be directed at delivering the healthy compromises needed to move the country forward. I expect therefore to see a marked improvement in the performance of the State institutions in the next four years.

Next, there must be a recommitment to the Rule of Law and the fight against corruption. Words are not enough. We need to see hard results. Many verdicts of the BiH Constitutional Court, which are “final and binding” under the terms of the Peace Agreement remain unimplemented. They must now be implemented, including the decision on Mostar. This town’s citizens must regain the basic right to elect their local officials.

Finally, challenges to Dayton and to the sovereignty of the State must stop. I am appalled that some leaders still insult the intelligence of their own citizens, believing that talk of secession, division and hatred will hide their own failures to deliver a better life for people.

While they pursue a long-term strategy to drive the country into the ground in order to justify breaking the country apart – with all the risks that such a strategy entails – young people are getting older without the educational and professional opportunities that living in a functional country would provide.

As the calls for a referendum on secession have been repeated time and time again in recent months, I have had to respond by reminding people of the facts: the Entities do not have the right to secede under the Peace Agreement.

I would like to make this clear once more: there will be no redrawing of borders.

And so I hope we will see the incoming authorities doing what is needed to get Bosnia back on track quickly. Is there an alternative? Yes there is.

The political leaders can go on doing what they have been doing over the last eight years.

If this is what they decide to do, they must know there will almost certainly be consequences and none of us will be able to claim that they have not been warned. The February demonstrations were a clear wake up call for the political establishment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for the International Community.

And while nobody could predict exactly when there will be another public backlash if the politics of the last eight years continues – it would be just a matter of time before it occurred. This is in no one’s interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I address you today, not only as the High Representative, but also as a true friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina who wants the best for its people.

I am aware that I have been blunt today, but there are times when the best thing you can do for a friend is to speak frankly and this is just such a time.

Those political leaders who choose to enter government in the coming weeks must now change their ways and they must – once and for all – break the vicious downward cycle of spiteful tit-for-tat politics that has led us to this point.

Just as Bosnians and Herzegovinians must raise their game so must the International Community because our job in Bosnia and Herzegovina has clearly not been completed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the time to reaffirm our commitment to a united and reintegrated Bosnia and Herzegovina and to be more united than ever as we seek to support the delivery of deep and sometimes painful changes that are required for the country to be functional, stable and prosperous.

Those politicians and people who want to work together in good faith to take the country forward will have our full

and active support.

Similarly, those who seek to advocate division and secession must finally understand that the drawing of borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina is behind us.

As I witnessed personally two days ago at the moving ceremonies that marked the fall of the Berlin Wall, the future is not about dividing people. It is about coming together to build a better tomorrow.

Thank you.