



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

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

Thank you for your time and attention here today, and especially thank you for your ongoing commitment to our common goal of irreversible peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina still merits close watch if we are to ensure that the gains made after the war in terms of stability, rebuilding the country and reconciling its peoples are not lost.

In my last address to the Security Council in May, I described how the political situation had reverted to the negative trends of the last seven years and how the country's elected leadership had failed to make a serious effort towards progress on Euro-Atlantic integration.

I regret to say that six months later, and with less than a year left until the next general elections, this is still the case.

In the past six months, the political leaders have again missed a chance to take a decisive step forward by agreeing to correct discriminatory provisions in the electoral system.

These changes are required by the European Court of Human Rights "Sejdic-Finci" judgment. Not only are such changes a condition for the country to move forward towards European Union candidacy, but they are a test of the country's ability to apply basic human rights standards in the conduct of elections and to live up to its international obligations.

Similarly, progress has remained elusive in regulating the question of the ownership of military property, which has kept Bosnia and Herzegovina from activating its Membership Action Plan with NATO.

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At the beginning of the reporting period, the public expressed its dissatisfaction with the inertia of elected leaders in demonstrations throughout the country, the most dramatic of which were seen outside the building of the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where in June several thousand demonstrators surrounded the building over nearly two days, with employees and visitors kept inside for several hours.

At the end of this reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina again saw protests of a different nature and a much smaller scale, related to the ethnic divisions in the education system. I believe the international community as a whole has underestimated the significance of education as part of the process of postwar reconciliation and reintegration.

While these two protests were of a very different nature, and about very different issues, they reveal the fundamental dissatisfaction that is present in many different segments of the country, both with the unresolved divisions within the country and with the lack of urgency among the country's leaders in reaching compromises to address those divisions and move forward.

They also reveal in my view that the public has understood something which many of the Bosnian leaders have still failed to grasp: that democracy is not only something to be exercised every four years through elections.

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Turning to the main political developments of the last six months, the general trend has been negative but there have been some exceptions. Significantly, the country managed in October to conduct its first population census since 1991. This is a significant development and vitally important for providing statistical information on social and economic issues. It will be important that the results of the census not be used to promote divisions or exacerbate ethnic tensions.

Generally the economic situation has been difficult: Bosnia and Herzegovina has, in addition to its own resources, continued to rely on external budgetary support over the past year to pay the bills, and the official unemployment rate is still 44%. This is another indication of the serious economic hardship suffered by a large portion of the population. At the same time, it should also be stressed that there have been some positive economic indicators, as for example with exports – where we have seen an 8% increase – and industrial production, where we have seen a 7% increase so far.

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From the point of view of my mandate to uphold the Dayton Peace Agreement, which includes the state constitution, I remain concerned by the readiness of the entities, in particular Republika Srpska, to challenge the competencies of the state provided for under the Peace Agreement.

An area of particular concern is the rule of law, where rhetorical attacks against the judicial institutions established to exercise the constitutional responsibilities of the state have continued.

This political interference in the work of the judiciary was taken a step further in October, when the Republika Srpska National Assembly issued another set of conclusions against the state-level judiciary.

Another concern with the rule of law is the ongoing failure of the domestic institutions to implement the verdicts of the BiH Constitutional Court, which are “final and binding” under the terms of the Peace Agreement. Over 80 such decisions remain unimplemented.

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During the reporting period, the dispute among the parties in government in the Federation continued, but its intensity diminished and the government got back to work, following my intervention with the Prime Minister and his deputy. My office also facilitated a resolution to fill long-standing vacancies on the Federation Constitutional Court to ensure that this important institution could continue its work.

Nonetheless, the crisis in the Federation has continued to reveal functional deficiencies and gaps in the entity's system of government and the ongoing need for reform in the Federation to make the system more functional, efficient and cost-effective. In this context, I welcome the initiative of local experts, supported by the US government, to reform the Federation constitution in order to improve the functionality of the entity, a process my office strongly supports.

The functional inefficiency of the Federation stood again in some contrast to the institutions of the Republika Srpska which functioned very smoothly. During the reporting period, they met on a regular basis, as the government continued its efforts to tackle the economic and social challenges facing the entity.

However, from the point of view of future risks to the stability of the country, I remain concerned about the continued statements by some of the most senior officials from Republika Srpska advocating for the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a country.

The Republika Srpska President remains the most frequent and vocal critic of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of BiH, recently boasting again that he will lead the entity to independence. During the reporting period, the Serb Member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency Mr. Radmanović also raised the possibility of an independence referendum, should half the members of the UN recognize Kosovo, presenting this as the official policy of Republika Srpska, previously adopted by the entity assembly.

In this context, I believe that the continued presence of the European Union and NATO military missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina still plays a vital role in reassuring the public that the country remains safe and secure despite the difficult political situation. In my view, the deterrent effect of a relatively small force with an executive mandate is well worth the investment. Given the difficult political circumstances and the chance for further challenges in 2014, I consider their continued presence to be a critical reassurance. I therefore warmly welcome the adoption of the UN resolution prolonging the mandate of the military missions for another year.

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Ladies and Gentleman, I want to conclude my remarks today on a more positive note.

For while we cannot ignore the ongoing lack of progress or the political instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we must also remember that the country, its leaders, and its peoples still have every chance to work together, to succeed, and to prosper.

The European Union has demonstrated its commitment to assisting BiH in meeting the country's EU aspirations time and again, engaging at the highest levels and reinforcing its presence on the ground with one of its most experienced and skillful diplomats, Ambassador Peter Sorensen.

He is doing an excellent job and has brought the European Union to center stage in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He and I, and our offices are cooperating closely, respecting our different but complimentary mandates, in order to achieve synergies for the country.

As we are here today at the UN, I should also mention the very good work which the UN family is currently doing on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the able leadership of UN Country Resident Coordinator, Yuri Afanasiev.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to see the potential for what Bosnia and Herzegovina could achieve, we need only observe how the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration have already transformed Bosnia's neighbors and brought with them enormous gains.

In this sense, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the benefit of the best regional situation in the last 20 years. The country has the benefit of good relations with Croatia, now a member state of the European Union under the capable leadership of President Josipovic, Prime Minister Milanovic, and Foreign Minister Pusic. Croatia also has 1,000 kilometers of common border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which means that now the EU has 1,000 kilometers of common border with BiH. The country also benefits from good relations with Serbia, a future candidate country, and the constructive policies of President Nikolic, Prime Minister Dacic, Deputy Prime Minister

Vucic, and Foreign Minister Mrkic. And ultimately Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to benefit from good relations with its third neighbor Montenegro.

We should remember that exactly the same opportunities are being offered to Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders as to these other countries in the region.

At the same time, the last few years have shown that the international community in its approach should not ignore some of the specificities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's history, its postwar settlement, and risks to its future stability.

Again, this should not be cause for despair, but rather cause for the international community to step back and consider whether there is a need to recalibrate our approach and how we can best help Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens on the track towards prosperity and political stability.

In this context, we need to stand together to support all those in Bosnia and Herzegovina who are ready to help the country progress, and to stand against those who would take the country backwards towards further division and disintegration.

With the sustained attention and good will of this body and the international community as a whole, I am sure we can help Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders, and its wonderful people, to reach their common goals.

Thank You.