

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

Mister President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by thanking the members of the Security Council for your continuing support and attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The question of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not fortunately have the immediate security dimensions of other issues you are dealing with in this august body. But I am sure you will agree with me that what happens to Bosnia and Herzegovina matters far beyond its borders.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that in so many ways has come to symbolise our shared commitment and quest for an integrated European continent rooted in lasting peace, stability, prosperity and tolerance.

As we strive to achieve this vision, we should of course take pride in the progress that has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina following the tragic wars of the 1990s. But equally, we must recognise that that the job is not yet done and our engagement remains essential if we are to safeguard the progress made thus far and build on it to reach our common goal.

In the six months since my last report, I regret to inform you that Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders have continued to fail the citizens of the country and to fall short of the very limited expectations of the international community. As a result, the country has fallen further behind its neighbours in the region.

Serbia and Kosovo are normalizing relations, following a historic deal negotiated by the EU's foreign policy chief Baroness Ashton, and Serbia appears poised to open accession talks with the EU. Croatia is now just seven weeks away from full membership, having served as a shining example to others in the region of what can be achieved if change is delivered through reform. Montenegro's progress is also impressive.

The region is moving on and Bosnia and Herzegovina will have, in seven weeks, one thousand kilometres of common border with the EU.

The region is moving on. Lamentably, Bosnia and Herzegovina meanwhile stagnates.

One year after another it is let down by its political leaders who continue to fail to reach the healthy compromises that are necessary to meet the requirements of Euro-Atlantic integration and to tackle the very serious economic and social challenges facing the country. All this despite the very generous, progressive, and reinforced engagement of the EU on the ground, and I would like to especially mention the tireless efforts of EU Special Representative Peter Sorensen.

The sad reality of Bosnian politics was brought home again in April when the country's leaders failed to reach agreement to implement a key ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, which would unlock the next stage in the EU integration process.

In this regard I would like to ask the political leaders: What should have been easier to solve, the implementation of the "Sejdic-Finci" ruling, or the historic issue of Serbia and Kosovo?

A similar dynamic has played out over the last two years with regards to the country's NATO aspirations, where little concrete progress has been reached to register military property in the name of the State, the requirement to unlock the country's entry into the alliance's Membership Action Plan.

Both tasks are simple, straight forward, involve little or no material cost and could be achieved within days with a minimum of political courage and an understanding that reaching healthy compromises through political dialogue is a win-win situation for all involved.

And yet the zero-sum approach to politics continues unabated year after year.

Mister President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, this approach must change and it must change now if the next sixteen months are not to be lost to unproductive election campaigning.

Before reviewing the main political developments of the last six months from the perspective of my mandate, I want to make clear in no uncertain terms that the fundamental reason for the country continuing to lag behind its neighbours is the fact that elected officials and political parties continue to put their own narrow personal and party political interests before the interests of the citizens and the country at large.

The fact that the pull of European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes have so far not proven strong enough to overcome this should be of concern to all of us and cause for serious reflection on the elements of our united strategy moving forward.

Turning now to the political developments of the last six months, it is the deepening political and constitutional crisis in the Federation, linked to a new parliamentary majority being formed in this entity that has dominated events.

Despite their majority, the new coalition, which has a clear and legitimate right to seek to reshuffle the government, has not been able to remove the existing government, as some parties have used constitutional blocking mechanisms designed to protect the rights of constituent peoples to block the adoption of a no-confidence vote. The crisis is further complicated by the fact that the institution responsible for resolving the blockage, the vital national interest panel of the constitutional court, does not function, due to the four-and-a-half year long failure by the competent authorities to appoint missing judges to this panel.

As if these developments were not a serious enough distraction from the pressing difficulties facing the authorities in the Federation, the President of the Federation was arrested on 26 April and remains in detention.

The smooth reshuffle of the Republika Srpska government in March of this year stands in sharp contrast to the situation in the Federation. The ruling coalition in the Republika Srpska elected a new Prime Minister and replaced a number of Ministers, seemingly in response to a worsening economic situation, which included public sector strikes. In contrast with the Federation government, the RS government has continued to meet regularly as it seeks to tackle the many economic and social challenges it is facing.

However, from the point of view of the mandate given to me under the Dayton Peace Agreement and reflected in successive Security Council Resolutions, I remain deeply concerned about fundamental challenges to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina coming from some representatives of Republika Srpska, including entity President Dodik.

Six months ago, I signaled that the issue of growing advocacy for the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina by RS officials deserved the special attention of the international community. My assessment in this regard has not changed. Statements made and actions taken during the reporting period, which are catalogued in my report, have in my view represented a continuation of this worrisome policy.

Just last month, but again a few days ago, the RS President said that Bosnia and Herzegovina “has absolutely no possibility to survive” and described Bosnia and Herzegovina as “a sufferer on its last breath, into whom the international community is still throwing capsules of oxygen claiming that it has to survive.” This is just one of many such statements cited in my report, and such statements have continued since this reporting period ended. Also symbolic of the retrograde politics that continues to prevail, statements denying that genocide was committed in Srebrenica have also continued.

In sharp contrast, Serbia’s President Tomislav Nikolic, and Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and Vice Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, expressing the sentiment of the Belgrade authorities, have in recent weeks shown the kind of political leadership that is worthy of the highest praise. When President Nikolic explicitly apologised for Srebrenica and other war crimes committed by individuals in the name of the Serbian state or people he made indeed a courageous step towards regional reconciliation that if followed up could open the way for further improvements in relations between Sarajevo and Belgrade.

It is also worth noting that, upon the initiative of Turkey, a meeting is taking place today of the Presidents of

Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu came personally to Sarajevo last week to prepare this historic meeting. His efforts are extremely important, not only for regional cooperation, but also for regional reconciliation, and of course his efforts have my full support.

In general, I also remain concerned about a pattern of disregard for the Rule of Law that has emerged in the last couple of years, not least in the Federation. For this reason I reported in a special report to the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council on the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The ongoing failure of local institutions to implement the November 2010 BiH Constitutional Court decision on Mostar 's electoral system is a case in point and represents a violation of the Peace Agreement, which states that decisions of the court "shall be final and binding." As a result, Mostarians were unable to vote in the 2012 local elections. The two largest parties in Mostar bear most responsibility for the failure to reach an agreement and I expect these two parties to start compromising.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the overall climate, the BiH authorities again failed to make concrete progress on the outstanding objectives set by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council as prerequisites for closure of the OHR.

Ladies and Gentlemen, not all the news has been bad, and I already mentioned some positive aspects coming out of the RS. The state-level Council of Ministers, which underwent a party reshuffle in November, has met regularly. The state budget for 2013 was adopted on time, the first time in two years. In general, however, the state-level coalition has so far been unable to deliver much needed progress on the legislative front.

A stable security situation is the starting point for everything else and through their continued presence, the European Union and NATO military missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have both continued to reassure citizens that the country remains safe and secure despite the difficult political situation and at a time when some senior politicians have repeatedly and openly called into question the future of the country. In advance of your deliberations in November, I would like to use this opportunity to express my strong belief that their presence, the presence of EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina under their existing mandate is essential to support ongoing international community efforts and also my ability to fulfill my civilian mandate.

Mister President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders and the parties they represent are faced with a choice that is increasingly stark with each passing day.

There can be no more excuses and there is no place to hide from their responsibilities. The choice is simple. They can succeed together or they can fail together.

I know them all – I know that they can do much better – And I call on them from this most distinguished of stages to show the courage to finally reach the healthy compromises that will enable the country to progress.

For our part we must continue to assist those in Bosnia and Herzegovina who want the country progress while also standing firm against all those who seek to reopen the wounds of the past. Bosnia and Herzegovina can only go forwards if it looks forward and not backwards.

I hope that when I report to you in six months that we can look forward to a 2014 full of progress and not one of deepening crisis.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina we need continuous attention of the international community, but we also need patience and a long term approach. New generations are coming and are ready to engage for this wonderful country.

Thank you.