Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko at a Symposium organised by the Woodrow Wilson Center

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Euro-Atlantic Integration and Ethno-Nationalism –
Two Dynamics at Work in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Good morning. Let me begin by thanking the Wilson Center for hosting this event today.

There are currently many places outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina where in the short term peace and security are in greater jeopardy and where the overwhelming foreign policy focus of the international community is rightly turned. From the point of view of incidents of violence, the last 17 years in Bosnia and Herzegovina have thankfully been a success story.

But a violence free Bosnia alone is not our objective – what we continue to aspire to is far more far reaching – a Bosnia and Herzegovina irreversibly on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration that secures lasting peace and stability for its people and as we are all aware the wider region.

So clearly the job in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not yet done.

In order to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to preserve the investment of diplomatic and financial resources of the international community over the last 17 years, the EU, the US and the rest of the PIC Steering Board must remain focused and united in addressing challenges

from those who would like to see the country fail.

Earlier this week, I gave my regular six-monthly address to the United Nations Security Council, assessing the state of implementation of the Peace Agreement. As some of you will know, Annex 10 of that agreement created the position of an international High Representative charged with interpreting and overseeing the implementation of its the civilian provisions, including Annex 4, the Bosnian state constitution. This is the function I currently serve. My mandate is additionally endorsed by the Security Council, which is why I report to them every six months on developments of the previous half year bearing upon the implementation of the peace.

Regrettably, I was unable to deliver a positive report this week.

This caused some controversy within Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the fact that just a few weeks earlier the European Union in its annual progress report had delivered an assessment that progress on the EU integration agenda had stalled, in part due to a lack of common vision among the country's leaders.

This did not take me by surprise. Politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina don't like being criticized. But what else can they expect given their track record over the last six months? Should we praise them?

Just six months ago, I was cautiously optimistic about the direction in which Bosnia was heading. After 15 months of waiting for political leaders to reach agreement following the 2010 General Elections, we had finally witnessed the appointment of a state-level government in February, followed by the long awaited adoption of a state budget.

Of equal significance, we had seen some signs that the country's leadership was finally taking seriously the

conditions set out by the EU and NATO for the country to make progress in joining those institutions. We saw the adoption of two key pieces of EU legislation, followed by a political agreement on how to resolve the issue of the distribution of military property, a key condition for Bosnia's participation in NATO's Membership Action Plan.

The leaders of the country's ruling political parties had also made a commitment to the European Union to deliver progress on a number of other important EU issues, including progress in implementing a ruling by the European Court for Human Rights addressing discriminatory provisions of the constitution which effectively deny access to certain public offices to persons who do not belong to one of the three dominant groups defined in the constitution.

Speaking frankly, these developments were not earth shattering, but given the political stagnation of the previous several months, they offered some hope that the dynamic of Euro-Atlantic integration, which remains the best blueprint for long-term stability and prosperity, had finally taken hold.

In May, when I delivered my last report to the Security Council, it was logical to expect that with a government and a budget in place, the new coalition would immediately make up for lost time and get down to addressing the pressing needs of citizens and delivering the requirements to open up the next phase of the EU and NATO accession processes.

To my disappointment this did not happen. Instead, a protracted effort to reconfigure the governing coalition began in early June, a process that will hopefully be resolved by the end of the year, following some six more months of time lost.

This dispute diverted attention from pressing challenges. While other countries in the region moved forward, Bosnia and

Herzegovina was left behind. One fact speaks volumes. Halfway through its mandate, and putting aside the 2011 and 2012 budgets, the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, has adopted just three new laws.

In addition to the legislative gridlock, at times in the Federation entity we saw political parties disregard constitutional and legal provisions in their haste to effect changes to governing coalitions. The question of which parties form the governing coalition is not a matter for the international community to weigh in on. However, when the rule of law is disregarded we should be concerned.

An issue of much greater concern to me has been the intensification of public calls by the most senior leadership in the Republika Srpska for the Serb entity to secede and for the state to dissolve. The President of the RS, the Serb member of the State Presidency, and the BiH Minister of Finance, to name a few officials, have all, quite publicly and openly expressed their wish that the country should fall apart. I told the Security Council very bluntly that this issue should be of great concern to the international community, as they represent direct challenges to Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Moreover, these statements have been accompanied by repeated challenges to the common institutions of the state. Most recently, the RS President has begun an initiative within the entity parliament to abolish the BiH Armed Forces.

Since my report came out and since I delivered my remarks on Tuesday. I have been harshly criticized by some for calling attention to these negative trends. It has been suggested that I am reporting negative developments in order to justify my own position. It has been suggested that I or my office am to blame for the problems of the country.

At the same time I have not heard a single critic deny the

veracity of facts reported on in the report. I have not heard senior RS officials claim that they have not advocated for secession.

Indeed my written report contains many examples of the types of inflammatory statements that have been uttered by very senior officials in the RS. How does one respond when a leading politician says that Bosnia and Herzegovina makes him feel sick and that he hopes to God it will fall apart soon? How would you react if someone were to say the same about your country?

In light of the mandate I have been given by the international community, a mandate which has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Security Council, I regretfully conclude that these challenges are worrisome enough to warrant the particular attention of this body. There is probably no issue more central to the Peace Agreement than the preservation of the unity and territorial integrity of BiH. Continued challenges to the state – including the RS' regular advocacy for its dissolution – especially considering the history of the conflict of the 1990's.

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Despite all of the challenges which I have outlined, foremost the persistence of ethno-nationalist rhetoric, I do believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the potential to catch up with its neighbours and make progress towards joining both the EU and NATO.

The last two weeks we have seen signs of a rapprochement on the formation of a new state-level coalition, between the SNSD and the SDP, the two parties from the Republika Srpska and the Federation that secured the most votes at the 2010 general elections. The readiness of these parties to start talking seriously about substantial issues is a welcome development, but the international community awaits the details of their

proposals and wants to be sure that they do not undermine what has been achieved so far through a huge effort.

There are two years left before the next general elections for the parties to form a governing coalition and rally around the Euro-Atlantic agenda.

If they do so, they will have the unwavering support of the international community. Indeed another reason for optimism is the unprecedented commitment that the European Union has made towards assisting the country.

It has been a full year since we completed the transition and reconfiguration of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the decoupling of the EU Special Representative from the Office of the High Representative and its incorporation into a stand-alone EU Delegation. The EU Delegation and my Office have established a very close working relationship on the ground. Ambassador Peter Sorensen has had an excellent start and his presence has indeed made an impact. We are coordinating our efforts, seeking synergies and win-win situations wherever possible.

However, no matter how good our cooperation within the international community, this alone cannot deliver progress. We are now very deep into a phase where the degree and speed of Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress will be determined by the ability or inability of the authorities in the country to deliver concrete results.

Looking at the situation from Washington or Brussels, the best way the international community can facilitate a positive outcome is by remaining united behind a common approach which supports those who seek to advance Bosnia and Herzegovina towards full Euro Atlantic integration while maintaining the executive mandates and safeguarding the hard-won progress that has been made thus far.

After my meetings over recent weeks with senior international

community officials I am more certain than ever that this is what we are all firmly committed to and there should be no doubt that I will continue to play my role to ensure that our strategy is successful.

There is no going backwards. Full Euro-Atlantic integration of a sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina remains our target and we remain committed until we reach it!

Thank you.