

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

Mister President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me take this opportunity to thank those members of the United Nations Security Council whose terms are concluding at the end of this year – Columbia, Germany, India, Portugal, and South Africa – for their support.

In what has been an especially challenging year for the Security Council, I would like to thank you for your readiness to encourage and support efforts to take Bosnia and Herzegovina forward towards our common objective of lasting peace and stability.

Let me also use this opportunity to wish the incoming members of the UN Security Council every success during their time on the Security Council.

Those of us working on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina know we can continue to rely on your support in the future. We will draw strength from this in what remains a challenging environment.

Ours is a just and important objective: lasting peace and stability for Bosnia and Herzegovina, irreversibly on track towards EU and NATO integration. It is an objective to which the international community remains firmly committed over twenty years after Bosnia and Herzegovina's international recognition in April 1992.

This commitment to our common cause with Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens was yet again made abundantly clear during the course of a series of high profile visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina during the reporting period, when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton visited Sarajevo together, as did UK Foreign Secretary William Hague a few days earlier.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, 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. I am pleased to inform you that 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 been a breath of fresh air. 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.

Regrettably this is where I must turn to less welcome developments, because political leaders are failing to produce what they should be 17 years after the Peace Agreement was signed.

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When I addressed this body six months ago, I was cautiously optimistic about the direction in which the country was heading. After 15 months of waiting for political leaders to reach agreement, we had finally witnessed the appointment of state-level executive authorities in February. On 31 May, the state budget was finally adopted.

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 the disappointment of many within the international community, this is not what happened.

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 move forward, Bosnia and Herzegovina was left behind. This situation was also reflected in the recent Progress Report of the European Union.

In addition to the legislative gridlock, at times in the Federation 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.

While the dispute continues at the Federation entity level, in the last two weeks we have seen signs of a rapprochement on the formation of a new state-level coalition, between 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. Without dialogue and a readiness to work towards healthy compromises there can be no progress.

At the same time, it is critically important that as these parties proceed with their agenda, they do not take steps to roll back reforms undertaken with great care over many years to further the Peace Agreement. The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board has been consistently firm on this point.

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Another issue of even greater concern to me has been the marked rise in challenges to the Peace Agreement, in particular those challenges to Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity that we have seen during the reporting period.

I have reported to you many times in the past about the anti-state, secessionist rhetoric emanating from the current RS leadership. Unfortunately, this rhetoric has intensified and worsened considerably during the last six months.

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? I am sure we would be concerned and shocked, and deeply saddened.

It would be a mistake to dismiss these words as empty or election-driven rhetoric. They have been supplemented over the last several years by a comprehensive effort to erode and in some cases eliminate the functionality of the state and its institutions. The latest of many state institutions which the RS has sought to abolish or emasculate is the BiH Armed Forces, a multinational structure that has earned praise for its contributions to peacekeeping operations around the world, including operations authorized by this very body.

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.

The United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary William Hague made quite clear during his recent visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina that "Bosnia can only be a member of the European Union as a single, sovereign state. Those who think that there is another way for Bosnia are simply wrong, and those who undermine the Bosnian state will not be our partners."

This is a view I fully share. These challenges are completely contrary to the strategic objective of full Euro-Atlantic integration, which Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities have together declared to be a priority. The time has come for senior politicians to stop opening wounds that are still healing and finally sincerely turn their attention to the country's future in the EU and NATO.

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In the context of the developments I just described, I was perhaps not surprised, but have been disappointed to see the authorities deliver very little progress on the five objectives and two conditions for OHR closure.

Nevertheless, there have been developments on the objective related to the Brcko District through actions undertaken by the international community. On 23 May the Steering Board endorsed my decision to close the OHR office in Brcko. Accordingly, I closed the Brcko Office on 31 August. The Steering Board also supported the decision of the Brcko Supervisor to suspend his functions as of the same date.

As a result of these actions by my Office and the Brcko Supervisor, we have entered a new phase in the Brcko District where the local authorities have taken full responsibility for the day to day affairs in the District. Given our responsibilities under the Final Award, both the Supervisor and I will be keeping a close eye on developments in the Brcko District.

In addition, a landmark ruling by the BiH Constitutional Court on the issue of state property has significant implications for the resolution of this issue, which is the second of the five objectives for OHR closure. In layman's terms, the court's decision affirms the primacy of the state's ownership of public property.

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After a campaign that rarely touched on local issues, the 7 October local elections passed largely without incident.

Once again Srebrenica was an area of focus for the International Community – and rightly so given the genocide that was committed there. One of the high level visitors was United Nations Secretary General Ban-ki Moon. Despite some controversy surrounding the registration and counting in Srebrenica, the elections thankfully passed without major incident. They resulted in a Bosniak Mayor and an equal distribution of seats between Serbs and Bosniaks in the municipal assembly. The parties must now come together to work in a spirit of reconciliation in the interests of all of Srebrenica's residents. A life of dignity and co-existence must be returned to Srebrenica. It should live up again to the etymology of its name, "the silver city".

In the still heavily scarred and divided city of Mostar, the prospect of delivering change through the ballot box remains on hold. Due to the ongoing failure of the parties to implement the Constitutional Court's ruling on Mostar's electoral system, the town was the only community in the country that did not hold local elections on 7 October. With no agreement in sight close to two years since the Court made its ruling, my office is currently engaged in a facilitation effort that aims to help the local parties to deliver a domestic solution to implement the Court's ruling without further delay. The discussions are in a crucial phase and it is time for all the parties to compromise and to implement the Court's ruling.

I very much hope that by the next time I report to you that we will have seen elections held in Mostar and that the country as a whole will be catching up with its neighbours in the region.

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to conclude by making the following points.

First, Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot afford to continue falling further and further behind other countries in the region. The consequences of this will be dire – economically, socially and politically.

Second, challenges to the Peace Agreement have become so frequent and direct during the reporting period that they deserve special attention. Questioning Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and its future as a state must stop. The International Community must not tolerate such challenges, and we must ensure that we are equipped with the will and capacity to manage them. In doing so, we will also be supporting the efforts of those willing to work for the collective good of delivering lasting peace and stability within the Euro-Atlantic framework.

We are in a critical phase and we must express more clearly than ever what is expected of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders and what will not be tolerated. They must stop their divisive behavior and finally start leading the way to the country's full reintegration in the interests of all its citizens.

In so doing they can look to the example of how postwar Europe was built, with tolerance, dialogue and sound compromise. As German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle put it recently: the word confrontation has been replaced in Europe by the word cooperation.

Allow me to conclude with the inspirational thoughts expressed by the United Nations Secretary General when he concluded his recent visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina:

"In a fast moving region, no one can afford to be left behind. That will take collective leadership. That will take unity. That will take a commitment to work and move forward, together."

Thank you.