

Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko opening a Panel Discussion on “The EU and Its Neighbours”

The Alpbach Forum, 23 March 2012

NATO-EU Dynamic Supports BiH Progress

Mr Chairman, Fellow Panellists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bosnia and Herzegovina's successful integration in Euro-Atlantic structures is an indispensable element in the European Union's long-term development strategy – the general topic of this forum — and an indispensable element in the European Union's relationship with its neighbours – the specific topic of our panel this morning.

BiH integration is indispensable to the overarching EU strategy for three reasons.

The first is that the integration of the Western Balkans — which will deliver substantial economic, social and security benefits to the people of the EU as well as to the people of the Western Balkans — cannot be completed if one or more of the states in the region is left out.

The second is that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the capacity to make a unique and distinctive contribution to the continent as a whole. The trauma of its recent past is, historically, an anomaly. The country has a more profound and more inspiring tradition of communal harmony from which Europe has important lessons to learn.

And the third is that in the present period, when the EU is grappling with economic challenges, it is imperative that it maintains a steady and pragmatic approach to resolving problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina so that it does not find itself with a new and completely unnecessary crisis on its borders.

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The good news is that after years of political deadlock, 2012 has got off to a good start in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 10 February – more than 16 months after the elections – a State government was finally appointed, and the incoming administration has pledged to put Euro-Atlantic integration at the top of its agenda.

Then on 9 March, political agreement was reached on the allocation of defence property and state property, which opens the way for NATO MAP, and which also represents a step forward in addressing the five objectives and two conditions set by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the OHR.

For the first time in a long time, we are seeing a political process based on dialogue and readiness to compromise. This has opened up the possibility that politicians will be able to break through the political and administrative impasse that has blocked progress for so long.

From the international perspective, I believe we must maintain a carefully calibrated approach as we move forward. Among other things, this means that we must maintain the necessary capacity to carry out and complete what we have set out to do. The fact is that much progress has taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this progress came as the result of a specific type of engagement on the part of the International Community.

I am encouraged by the proactive and constructive approach adopted by both NATO and the European Union, and I am convinced that recent progress is the direct result of a positive NATO-EU dynamic.

NATO and the EU have been and will continue to be lynchpins of Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and complete postwar recovery. The forthright engagement of both offers reassurance and encouragement to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at the same time provides practical support to the political leadership.

The remaining element in the country's recovery is the fostering of a self-sustaining political culture that is constructive, inclusive and forward-looking.

In this respect, I believe the EU integration process is particularly crucial – because the values of civil society, economic freedom, political freedom and the rule of law that underpin this process are precisely the values that must take root in Bosnia and Herzegovina if the country is to complete its post-war recovery.

Recent developments offer the hope of genuine progress. We hope to see more in the way of concrete results – but from the present perspective I believe we have grounds for optimism.

Thank you