Speech by High Representative and EU Special Rrepresentative Valentin Inzko on BiH's Path to the EU and the Role of Regional Cooperation

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The International Community is on the Side of BiH Citizens

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As many of you may know, last year, during a visit by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, the Yunus Emre cultural centre was opened in Sarajevo. This was the first in a series of centres which the Yunus Emre Foundation plans to operate outside Turkey.

Clearly, the centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects the close historical and cultural ties that exist between Turkey and the Balkans. But more than this, it reflects the *type* of culture that has traditionally flourished in Southeast Europe and which is reflected in the numinous humanism of Yunus

Emre’s poetry.

It was Emre who penned the wise and deceptively simple lines that

Water out of the same fountain
Cannot be both bitter and sweet.

echoing in this case the New Testament Letter of Saint James.

We are all water from the same fountain, regardless of ethnicity or religion or political affiliation.

This is a truth that outsiders sometimes presume to teach people in the Balkans – yet it is woven into the very fabric of Balkan culture and has been respected in Southeast Europe for centuries.

This is a region as diverse as any on the continent and its prosperity and security will be developed *because* of that diversity not *despite* it – because the solidarity of people and communities of *different* religions and cultures tends to be more creative, more resilient and more flexible than the simple solidarity of those who believe the same things and follow the same traditions.

And just as there is a matrix of cultures in the region itself, so there is among the region’s principal partners a diverse range of traditions and interests.

Turkey’s increased involvement in Western Balkan diplomacy in recent years has evolved and succeeded in this multi-cultural context. Turkey and other international players have a distinctive contribution to make.

A diplomatic revolution

The common aspiration of all the countries in the Western Balkans to secure EU membership has developed into what has

rightly been described as a diplomatic revolution.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbours have embarked on a process of rapprochement led by Zagreb and Belgrade. In 2010 we have seen important gestures and initiatives designed to draw a definitive line between the tragedy of the past and the possibilities of the present and the future.

Among countries outside the region, Turkey has made a key contribution to this diplomatic thaw and I would like to take this opportunity to express publicly the appreciation of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the committed, creative and productive stance that has been adopted by President Gül, Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu.

On the ground I have developed a close and cooperative relationship with Ambassador Vefahan Ocak and this has been invaluable in carrying out my work, both as High Representative and as EU Special Representative.

Perhaps at this point I might allude to the historical affinity that an Austrian diplomat has with his Turkish counterparts when it comes to operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For obvious historical reasons we share some advantages and some disadvantages.

The disadvantages derive from the fact that a very long time ago our countries played an occupying role in the country. There is in consequence an understandable sensitivity about the role we can play today.

But this is a matter of *sensitivity*, no more than that. Experience shows that if we too are sensitive there is no reason why history should get in the way of our present efforts to make an effective contribution to resolving some of Bosnia's problems.

The advantages of our common past are that we have a certain

affinity with Bosnia and Herzegovina and its complex culture – because our countries at one time or another had a direct bearing on the development of that culture.

Progress

The fifteenth anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement offers a useful opportunity to take stock – to examine what has been achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to consider the road ahead.

For more than a decade, strong leadership by the International Community, coordinated through the OHR, ensured that remarkable progress was made – considerably greater progress, I suspect, than any of the signatories of the DPA believed possible.

An end to the hostilities and substantial refugee return have been among the many achievements. During the first four years after Dayton, we witnessed a "normalisation" of political discourse. Hate speech, which emphasised division and specialised in fuelling animosity and fear was no longer acceptable.

In addition to the infrastructure reconstruction, which was largely completed by the beginning of this decade, Bosnia and Herzegovina made remarkable progress in building an economy that is substantially different from the heavy-industry dependent model that existed before the conflict.

Until the onset of the global recession, the country was recording the highest economic growth rates in Southeast Europe. The Convertible Mark remains the region's most stable currency, and successful reforms such as the introduction of a state-of-the-art VAT system, have facilitated the development of a genuinely entrepreneurial market economy.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is an efficient and effective member of the UN Security Council.

In short, it is evident that BiH underwent a deep transformation, in particular during the first eleven years after Dayton.

Unfortunately, this positive trajectory has been followed by a negative swing.

Troubling developments

Despite the positive developments I have described, Bosnia's current reality is troubling.

As diplomatic rapprochement has gathered pace across the Western Balkans, an opposite trend has emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The reform process has ground to a halt and there have even been attempts to roll back reforms that have been introduced and that are already delivering benefits to citizens.

This has been caused by a partial resurgence of the ethnic chauvinism that was so comprehensively discredited by the catastrophe of the conflict.

It is no coincidence that resurgent nationalism has been accompanied by resurgent poverty and crime.

The global recession is not the only culprit for declining living standards and rising unemployment. These things have been brought about by political paralysis and the wilful obstruction of legislative measures that would have helped to ameliorate the effects of the recession.

Thus, the priority in Bosnia and Herzegovina today must be to end a vicious cycle in which the material interests of citizens are systematically sacrificed for the political interests of a small minority.

A handful of political leaders may believe they have an interest in undermining Bosnia and Herzegovina's recovery and entrenching their own position on a narrow communal power

base.

This strategy has been tried before, and it failed miserably.

It will fail again.

A fresh start

But it is by no means too late for leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to abandon this dead-end approach. I have made the point repeatedly in recent weeks that the October election creates the possibility of a fresh start in the political process.

This fresh start can deliver enormous dividends to citizens, particularly against the backdrop of the improved regional environment.

No one in Bosnia and Herzegovina wants the next four years to be as confrontational and unproductive as the last four years. Citizens want progress not paralysis, integration not further division.

In the final analysis, it is up to the people to decide how much indulgence they will extend to their leaders.

On the other hand, there is no reason why a small number of politicians should decide how much or how little the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina will benefit from Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Euro-Atlantic integration agenda was established by consensus and has consistently won the explicit and overwhelming support of the general population.

No politician has the right to qualify the aspiration of four million people with his own conditions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving forward on a path that will take it to full membership of NATO and the European Union as a

prosperous, secure and sovereign state.

Those who wish to stop this course are at odds with the vast majority of their own people and with the International Community.

The building blocks of post-war recovery and Euro-Atlantic integration are embedded in the Dayton Peace Agreement.

The DPA reaffirms and guarantees Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty, specifically in Annex 4, the BiH Constitution.

Dayton also provides for a NATO-led Stabilisation Force – today EUFOR – and the position of High Representative as the highest authority in interpreting and ensuring implementation of the Agreement. This is the function I exercise today. It is a function that will continue to be exercised as long as it is needed.

In supporting this country's progress, its sovereignty and its development as a prosperous and secure market economy, the International Community is very clearly at one with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I see no reason why we should be self-conscious or circumspect about this.

The bargain

The recent decision by the European Union to grant visa-free travel to citizens of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina is significant because it validates the bargain that exists between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans.

Obviously, lifting the visa requirement has practical ramifications – it will increase travel between the two countries and the EU and it will have a positive impact on economies in the region, not least by making it easier for entrepreneurs to come and go between markets.

But even more than these practical benefits, the decision reaffirms the historic commitment of the European Union to open its doors to the Western Balkans.

Suggestions that Europe is merely paying lip service to southeast expansion, or that the integration agenda consists of impossible or unfair requirements are spurious.

The integration process involves embracing the judicial, social, economic and political norms that have delivered peace and prosperity to the 500 million citizens of the European Union. When requirements are fulfilled – as the case of visa liberalisation shows – practical benefits for citizens quickly follow.

There is nothing obscure or unfair about this.

The latest European Commission Progress Report found that Bosnia and Herzegovina has failed to implement key elements of the agreed agenda – principally because some political leaders have consciously sought to undermine the process.

As a result of this domestic political strategy, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina had to wait longer than others before they were able to take advantage of visa-free travel, and today they do not have access to a whole host of benefits that they would otherwise enjoy.

Reaching the desired destination

A great deal of political energy has been expended on arguments over the continuing role of the OHR. Interestingly, those who have been at the forefront of calls for the OHR to be closed have also led the opposition to fulfilling the requirements that would make OHR closure possible.

The Peace Implementation Council laid out the criteria for closure almost three years ago, and the necessary steps could have been taken by now.

But they have not been taken, and the fact that they have not been taken is evidence that the domestic political establishment has not been able to conduct the business of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina professionally and efficiently.

The OHR can and will continue to carry out the role assigned to it under the peace settlement until the objectives and conditions for closure are met. OHR can continue its work alongside a reinforced EU presence.

I have never made any secret of the fact that I believe the period of using the Bonn Powers regularly as a substitute for the functioning of the local authorities is definitively over. But at the same time, the International Community as guarantors of the Dayton Agreement, and my office as the principal arbiter of that agreement have the authority and will exercise that authority to prevent any attempt to undermine the post-war settlement.

The constitutional reform negotiations that must resume in the coming months can deliver some of the solutions to a dysfunctional and underperforming state government that has made continued international engagement in domestic politics necessary.

As you will know, the basic premise of this reform is to ensure that every citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoys the same fundamental civil and political rights as citizens in the European Union.

Here too the poet Yunus Emre, writing more than seven centuries ago, articulated fundamental good sense that could be applied to great effect in most countries of the world today:

See all people as equals,

he wrote

See the humble as heroes.

The heroes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the four million citizens who have endured tremendous hardship with fortitude for much too long. The International Community is on the side of those four million people and we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that they are not prevented from reaching their desired destination, as citizens of a sovereign, prosperous and secure state that is fully integrated in the European Union.

Thank you