Statement by the High Representative Valentin Inzko on the 20th Anniversary of the Peace Agreement

On the 20th Anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement we should not take for granted how successful the Peace Agreement has been at delivering peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the tragedy in Syria and events around the world continue to remind us, peace is hard-won and peace is priceless.

Peace and stability is the base, the starting point, but people rightly want more than just peace. They want to live in a society where individuals have a chance to achieve their personal and public goals through talent and effort; they want this kind of society for themselves and their children.

In this regard, the last ten years have been a disappointment for many citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the international community. Commentators have often pointed to the complexities of the system of government created at Dayton as the primary cause of Bosnia and Herzegovina's stagnation.

As Bosnia and Herzegovina moves forward along the path towards integration with the European Union and NATO, I do believe that the Dayton constitution will at some point need to be amended and the system made more functional. But this is not something that I or anyone else will or can impose. Constitutional changes will come when Bosnia is ready. They will be adopted through the amendment procedure contained in the constitution, which requires the agreement of all of the three largest ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. No one will be threatened by this.

In the meantime, I do not believe it is useful or accurate to blame Dayton for all of the problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or to throw up our hands and say that the system cannot work without constitutional change.

This is simply not the case. In fact, the first ten years after Dayton proved that previously unimaginable reforms can become a reality when political leaders are focused on reaching compromise in the interests of creating a functional society where citizens can realize their potential.

For example, we should not forget that the vast majority of people who fled their homes were eventually able to regain possession of them thanks to the framework provided through Annex 7 of the Peace Agreement. Other reforms undertaken to implement the Peace Agreement similarly brought improvement to people's lives: the creation of a single, stable BiH currency; common license plates to facilitate free movement and the reintegration of people; single ID cards and modern passports, central to citizens being able to travel visa-free in the European Union; a modern Value Added Tax system that has shown impressive results in collecting 56 billion KM since 2005 to the benefit of all in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The establishment of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina ten years ago stands out as perhaps the clearest example of a reform that would have been deemed unthinkable in Dayton in 1995, but that became a reality when the country and the International Community came together around a common vision – the vision of Euro-Atlantic integration.

These examples should serve as an inspiration as to what is possible, when political leaders set their sights on an ambitious reform agenda in the interests of the citizens. The 20th Anniversary of the Dayton Agreement is the right moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders to refresh and rediscover their vision for the future of the country.

This is particularly important, because we do now have a promising initiative from the European Union, which the authorities have committed themselves to complete, adopting their own ambitious reform agendas, and action plans. These reforms are primarily related to the economy, and this is absolutely the right approach.

Over the next months, we shall see whether the authorities are committed to delivering measures listed in their own reform agendas. Some of the reforms will be difficult, but they will bring new opportunities for the country and its people. Looking at and beyond the current reform agenda, let us not shy away from the ambition that took us so far in the first ten years of peace implementation.

Over the last twenty years, the international community has invested huge diplomatic and financial resources into Bosnia and Herzegovina towards a single, unwavering goal: to see a functional and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina, a state working in the interests of its citizens, as a fully integrated member of the Euro-Atlantic family. Today we continue to stand with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to work towards this vision.