

# **Press Conference following the session of the PIC Steering Board**

## **High Representative Valentin Inzko**

Good afternoon ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for coming.

Before we start, I would like to ask all of you to join in a minute of silence as a sign of our respect for all those who lost their lives in the recent terror attacks in Paris, Sinai, Ankara, Sarajevo and other parts of the world.

Thank you.

As you are aware, over the course of today and yesterday, we had the session of the PIC Steering Board Political Directors and, as has become customary, after these sessions, Bruce and I wanted to talk to you directly.

You will receive a copy of the adopted Communiqué after this press conference.

I need to mention here that unfortunately the Russian Federation was unable to join in two of the paragraphs in today's Communiqué, although we reached agreement on all of the other parts of the Communiqué.

This year, we are marking the twentieth anniversary of the General Framework Agreement for Peace and the main item on our agenda was the assessment as to how far we have come in its implementation and what lessons we learned during the process.

We can clearly say that the first years of peace implementation saw some great achievements by domestic authorities and the international community working together, within the Dayton Framework.

The PIC SB noted the positive transformation that BiH has undergone since then and urged all the authorities in BiH never to cease their efforts in building a democratic and functional state, operating under the rule of law, and in accordance with the GFAP.

It is also fitting today to mention the establishment of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina exactly ten years ago. The merging of three armies which fought one another for three-and-a-half years into a single Armed Forces, which has been participating with distinction in peacekeeping missions around the world, 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 domestic stakeholders and the International Community came together around a common vision – the vision of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Today, the EU initiative, which the authorities have committed themselves to complete, and the implementation of the ambitious BiH Reform Agenda is the way forward.

That is what we have discussed this morning with the members of the BiH Presidency. Since our last meeting, the country has made some important progress and the Presidency and the state level authorities have been pivotal in enabling this process. We now need to see more concrete results. I stress, we need to see more concrete results.

Besides their role in the Reform Agenda, the Presidency also contributed to a positive atmosphere within the region. I cannot emphasize enough how much a positive regional atmosphere is important for BiH's future progress. The Communiqué highlighted the importance of positive regional developments. We need to see this positive trend continue.

Even more important is that the leaders and people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are coming together, because reintegration remains central to securing lasting stability and prosperity.

The PIC Steering Board also called on the BiH authorities and institutions to maintain positive momentum in implementing required reforms – including socioeconomic, rule of law, justice and public administration – in line with citizens' demands and in cooperation with civil society.

Also, the PIC Steering Board encouraged all relevant authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in their efforts to combat terrorism, to prosecute those involved in terrorist activities, to prevent radicalization and to reinforce cooperation among authorities within BiH and with other countries in this regard.

We have discussed several other important issues.

Now, I would like to ask my Deputy, Mr. Bruce G. Berton to speak about those in more detail.

**PDHR, Bruce G. Berton**

Thank you High Representative,

As you said, the PIC Steering Board discussed several other issues that are of crucial importance for the present time and certainly for the future of BiH.

To begin with the referendum initiated by the RSNA on 15 July, on the authority and decisions of the state judiciary and the authority and past decisions of the High Representative.

As the final interpreter of the Peace Agreement, the High Representative has been extremely clear on this issue: This is a breach of the Dayton Framework, in particular Annexes 4 and 10.

At today's session, the PIC Steering Board underlined its unequivocal commitment to the preservation of BiH's territorial integrity and sovereignty in accordance with international law emphasizing that under the GFAP, entities have no right to secede from BiH and only exist legally by virtue of the BiH Constitution.

The PIC SB called on all competent authorities in the country to make use of the Structured Dialogue on Justice, as a more appropriate forum for addressing judicial reform efforts.

Over the last couple of days we have witnessed another challenge aimed at the highest judicial institution of this country: BiH Constitutional Court.

The decision in question has not been officially published as we speak, therefore it would not be proper to make any comments on it.

What I can see is that the PIC Steering Board was clear that the requirement under Annex IV of the Peace Agreement, the BiH Constitution, that decisions of the Constitutional Court are final and binding must be respected.

As in any other country, constitutional or supreme courts may come out with verdicts some parts of society do not like, but they must still be respected and implemented.

So I think it is fair to say that the PIC SB was clear that the BiH Constitutional Court is an integral part of Annex 4 of the GFAP, and is key to its implementation.

We have also discussed the issue of education, an incredibly important sphere where we continue to see the basic issues being abused to the detriment of school children. We firmly believe that the education is of the paramount importance for reconciliation and mutual understanding in BiH.

After this session of PIC SB, one thing remains clear: the international community is strongly committed to a stable, secure, prosperous BiH.

We have come a long way over the last 20 years. We will work to do everything we can to assist the country in making decisive progress to advance with its reform agenda while also ensuring that the Peace Agreement is fully respected.

Now, we would be happy to take questions.