

Statement by High Representative Valentin Inzko on the 21st anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement

Twenty-one years ago tomorrow, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was initialled in Dayton. On 14 December, it was signed in Paris. Those who were here at that time will remember the reaction among citizens – the single, overriding realisation that finally the war was over.

The agreement stopped the war, and it has maintained peace. No one should diminish or forget the importance of this. The Article I of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is part of the Dayton Agreement, affirms the legal continuity of BiH: “The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the official name of which shall henceforth be ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina,’ shall continue its legal existence under international law as a state, with its internal structure modified as provided herein and with its present internationally recognized borders.” I am mentioning this because 21 years after Dayton there are still political forces within BiH which are promoting, on an almost daily basis, their revisionist interpretation of Dayton that is evidently in contrast with this article of the Constitution.

As part of the peace implementation process, based on the Dayton Peace Agreement and with the positive participation of the entities and political parties across BiH, many institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been created. Unfortunately, for a while now certain political subjects that took active part in the creation of institutions at the State level have been talking about so-called “legal violence” and “imposing of decisions.” None of that is true. The State-level institutions were established in line with the BiH Constitution.

I am proud that the OHR and the rest of the International Community have been a part of this 21-year process. The political subjects in BiH that were involved in this process should also be proud to have been able at one point to gather enough political strength to establish the BiH Armed Forces, SIPA, ITA, Border Police, and six State-level ministries, just to name a few. They should be particularly proud that their efforts enabled those who fled their homes to repossess their properties and rebuild their homes.

Twenty years ago I was Austria’s Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I worked with people who were giving every last ounce of energy and effort to get the country back on its feet. I encountered teachers and doctors and taxi drivers and demobilized soldiers and mothers and fathers and sons and daughters – all they wanted to do was come to terms with the tragedy, repair the damage, and get on with living a decent, normal life.

The International Community saw this effort and backed the Dayton Agreement with five billion dollars in reconstruction aid, followed by other means of assistance, for the purpose of supporting the public services and public administration, agricultural and industrial initiatives, and projects that empower citizens.

Some political leaders, who in the past played a positive role, have since decided to focus on division of territory and power. They see Dayton as an *a la carte* menu from which they can choose only the things that are to their liking, which is why I have to say clearly that the Dayton Agreement is an integral document with all of its components still in force. What some refer to as the “original Dayton” also contains, for example, the Annex X (Office of the High Representative), Annex VII (the right to return to pre-war homes), or the presence of foreign judges in the Constitutional Court. The Dayton Agreement contains provisions that would allow citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, if there is a minimum of good will, to develop a normal European society, with modern, functioning political, judicial and social welfare systems.

Today it seems there are two parallel political realities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of them would see the country moving along the path towards the EU, which is a positive trend that should be supported. The other one consists of negative trends that started in the RS ten years ago, and now appear to have spilled over to the FBiH.

The politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina ought to show enough wisdom to choose the way forward, because the way backward can bring nothing good to the people of this country.