

Press Conference following the session of the PIC Steering Board

Check against delivery.

High Representative Valentin Inzko

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to today's press conference.

Before we begin, allow me to introduce to you my new Principal Deputy and Brcko Supervisor, Dennis Hearn. He has been with us since October and this was his first session of the political directors of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council.

So, once again – a warm welcome to Dennis!

We shall both address you today and brief you on the session that we had yesterday and today.

As per our usual practice, copies of the communique will be waiting for you after we finish the press conference.

Over the course of our session, we reached a high level of agreement when it comes to the text of the Communique, although – unfortunately, the Russian Federation decided not to associate themselves with the text.

I would not go into details behind their decision. I am certain that the representatives of the Russian Federation will provide you with an answer, should you have any questions about it. This in no way reduces the role of the Russian Federation in the PIC Steering Board which we respect. While there may be a difference of views on certain issues, we all share the same goal for this country of irreversible stability and prosperity. This was something which emerged clearly during our discussions and we are all committed to BiH sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Speaking about Russia, we should also not forget that the Russian Federation gave its full support to the resolution of the United Nations Security Council about the extension of EUFOR.

Now, allow me to move to the session itself: yesterday, our focus was on the significant developments since our June meeting, accenting the electoral issues and rule of law. We also discussed reform processes, including those related to EU integration and the structural reforms needed for the IMF program. We took a hard look at the serious political, social and economic challenges Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing.

We met with the members of the BiH Presidency and with representatives of BiH judicial institutions.

Unfortunately, we have continued to see the areas of public disagreement and division widen, and political actors have not shifted to a more constructive, consensus-oriented approach. As a result of that, the reform processes has slowed down, or has come in certain areas to a standstill.

We hope that in the coming days or weeks the excise legislation required under the IMF arrangement and EU processes will buck this trend. And we also hope that the expert progress on finishing the Questionnaire will lead to its eventual submission.

At this point, I must say that the negative trends continue to dominate, regrettably. Many delegations have expressed a grave concern over the persistent divisive rhetoric by some politicians in BiH. Over the last months, we have witnessed intense talk about secession of entities, hypothetical war scenarios and negation of ICTY verdicts.

We saw this clearly after the recent ICTY verdicts in the Mladic and Prlic *et al* cases.

The last six months were marked by lack of progress, or slow progress. Opportunities were wasted, considerable funding lost due to political infighting and the authorities avoiding their responsibilities, including the state-level institutions being unable to pass key legislation and implement reforms crucial to social and economic progress, as well as the 5+2 conditions necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

The RS has continued with its long-standing challenges to Bosnia and Herzegovina, in line with its Dayton-

revisionist narrative that BiH is a union of states as is stated in the 7 November 2017 RSNA Conclusions. It is not: Republika Srpska is a component entity of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and not a state in its own right. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one state which is heavily decentralized. Of course we from the International Community wish to have more functionality.

Let me repeat: the foreign policy and seeking membership in international organizations and institutions is the exclusive competency of the state-level institutions. It is written so in the original Dayton Constitution.

Also of note, the RSNA did take the Decision on the referendum about the BiH judiciary and the HR authorities out of force. This, of course, is a positive development. The earlier referendum decision, which was a clear Dayton violation, should not have been taken in the first place.

As for the Federation BiH, the same functionality problems have persisted and have been exacerbated by the lack of shared policy objectives by the Federation-based governing political parties, including some Bosniak coalition members.

It is clear that political parties have already started with the pre-election campaign. In many respects this election campaign is too long, and we think that reforms should still be made, decisions should still be taken in order to use this time before the elections.

Ladies and gentlemen, what I presented to you is the situation in BiH as seen by the political directors of the Peace Implementation Council.

Now to possible solutions.

Political directors identified urgent priorities and called on the relevant BiH authorities to deliver on them in the period ahead.

I would now like to turn to my principal deputy Mr. Dennis Hearne to inform you in more detail about the identified priorities.

PDHR, Dennis Hearne

Thank you, High Representative!

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the High Representative already outlined, over the last two days of meetings some urgent priorities have been identified. Progress on these priorities is essential if the country is to move from its current stalemate.

The International Community is interested in the smooth conduct of Elections and implementation of the Election results, for which an Electoral reform has to be agreed. This is a difficult task for the political parties, but not an impossible one.

The BiH authorities have enough time to take the necessary steps to enable the whole process to be implemented without undue delays.

The political parties will have plenty of time to campaign as we move closer to the elections. Until then, the important work on reforms should continue and there must be strong leadership from the Presidency, senior officials on all levels of government, and party leaders, to find a successful approach in time to prepare for elections.

The time until October next year should be used to refocus and deliver on issues that are important to citizens. In that context, unilateral actions should not be undertaken and principles of compromise, dialogue and consensus among the three constituent peoples should be adhered to.

The PIC SB also called on BiH authorities to strengthen regional cooperation, increase the country's competitiveness, and advance BiH's EU aspirations.

I would like to speak a bit more about another issue we have discussed today, an issue which undermines citizens'

confidence in democratic institutions and the rule of law, hurts the economy and deprives the state from much-needed tax revenue. That issue is corruption.

We invited the President of the Court of BiH, Ranko Debevec, BiH Acting Chief Prosecutor, Gordana Tadic, President of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, Milan Tegeltija, and Ms. Lejla Ibrovic, the Executive Director of Transparency International to our session today to hear directly from them where the country stands in its anti-corruption efforts.

We discussed development of independent, efficient, impartial, and professional judicial, prosecutorial, and law enforcement institutions throughout BiH, which are able to investigate and prosecute corruption, especially at high levels, thus enhancing the authority of judicial institutions on all levels and building the people's confidence in them.

The effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts undertaken by local institutions is a key prerequisite for entrenching the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the PIC Steering Board, strengthening of the rule of law and the fight against corruption are the top priorities.

The Dayton Peace Agreement defines Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state governed by the rule of law, and we believe authorities with responsibilities in this area need to do more to ensure that more cases of corruption are brought to trial.

Deficiencies in the rule of law, in particular the corruption, contribute to the huge exodus of talented young people from this country and strengthen the forces of nationalism and division.

You will note in the communique that another issue which is important for development of the country and its future is education.

BiH authorities are expected to find durable solutions to overcome discriminatory practices in education, such as the 'two-schools-under-one-roof', lack of access to National Group of Subjects, breaches of the Criteria for School Names and Symbols, and should implement the constitutional rights of citizens in the sphere of education, including the right of constituent peoples and others to name and use their own language.

Clearly, the country is facing many challenges yet the main message from this PIC meeting is a simple one: political leaders must assume responsibility and act together to deliver results to the benefit of the citizens. Vision, courage to make meaningful compromises in the name of progress for all of BiH's peoples, and genuine leadership are required, not political posturing for election purposes or divisive rhetoric that harkens back to the recent tragic past.

Thank you.