

# **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 following the two-day session of the political directors of the PIC Steering Board.

My Principal Deputy, Dennis Hearne of the United States, and I will brief you on the discussions that we had and conclusions we have put in the communique, which will be distributed to you after this press conference.

Our discussions were very focused and the Political Directors shared most of the same concerns about the direction in which BiH is going and on what the priorities need to be in the period ahead. This is reflected in the text of Communique, which will be distributed to you. It contains one footnote, but other than that, there was unanimity among the countries of the PIC on the assessment of the situation here and what needs to be done.

To begin, there was unity in expressing once again the international community's full commitment to the territorial integrity and fundamental structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single sovereign state. The PIC also reaffirmed its full support to the High Representative and his mandate.

Over the last two days, we had extensive agenda, with many issues to discuss.

The forthcoming October elections were high on the list. Many members of the Steering Board criticised the disruptive rhetoric, which some political figures are using and the very first forward looking message to all authorities in BiH is to refrain from further divisive and nationalist rhetoric.

The OSCE provided the PIC Steering Board with an update on technical improvements to the voting process and electoral monitoring activities.

As you know, colleagues from the EU Delegation and US Embassy are working to facilitate negotiations amongst political parties aimed at reaching an agreement on electoral reform and they briefed political directors on the undertaken activities. Their efforts are focused on reaching an agreement to amend the election law in accordance with the BiH Constitutional Court's decision concerning the indirect election of delegates to the Federation House of Peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is a pressing need for the parties in the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to address this issue so that after the elections, governments and parliaments can get to work quickly on the economic and political reforms needed to improve citizens' lives and to bring the country closer to the EU.

There is an ongoing concern that if the issue with the Federation House of Peoples is not cleared up in the coming months, implementation of the election results may be hampered and the formation of authorities specifically at the Federation and State levels could drag on for a very long time.

In my view, at this point in time, it is important to create sufficient space for the continuation of negotiations between the political parties.

Other options should be left aside.

Our guests at the session were the members of the BiH Central Election Commission, the institution in charge for the preparations for the upcoming Elections.

From them, we wanted to hear more on the current state of the preparations for the election, about pre-election rhetoric, the potential for fraud and what is being done to prevent it and the status of international recommendations about what can be improved in the electoral system.

I would now give floor to my Principal Deputy, Dennis Hearne to brief you on discussion that the Political Directors of the PIC Steering Board had during the second day of our session.

**PDHR, Dennis Hearne**

Thank you, High Representative and a warm welcome from me too.

While the first day of our session was entirely dedicated to the October elections, during the second day discussions, we touched upon few on-going challenges that the country is facing and which may represent serious obstacles to BiH's overall political stability and progress.

Just a few days ago, the country was at the verge of a serious crisis with grim consequences for all its citizens – I'm referring to the ongoing failure of the BiH Parliament to correct provisions of the BiH Criminal Procedure Code in line with a recent decision of the Constitutional Court.

This situation highlighted how difficult it is to achieve real reform in areas like anti-corruption, when some seem to have an incentive to preserve the status quo or even unravel previous reforms.

The crisis has been averted, thanks to the Constitutional Court but the BiH Parliament still has the responsibility to amend the legislation accordingly and to adopt amendments to the CPC that are inline with the International standards and that would serve all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Political Directors were very clear as to what needs to be done in this regard – you will see it in the Communiqué.

They were equally clear about another issue that dominated public discourse in the months before: the issue of migrants, which brought to the surface some vulnerabilities of the system.

In addition, the institutions contributing to economic progress face serious challenges. Those include the BiH Indirect Taxation Authority (ITA) and the BiH Electricity Transmission Company (Transco). The Steering Board discussed these issues as well.

We have had an open discussion on all of those issues, and while we sometimes do have different opinions and advocate different perspectives, we have common goals for BiH – lasting peace, stability and prosperity. As for immediate priorities – they are all listed in the Communiqué, copies of which are ready for you.

From the outset of the process, this time we decided, among all SB delegations, to try to focus on a very concise document that is very specifically focused on current issues, priorities and concerns. You will see it is a concise document and that is a reflection of a deliberate effort on our part. There is only one footnote. It is in a section of the document dealing with the issue of armament for police forces. The Russian Federation put in the footnote, and I would refer you to them for a further explanation of their thinking on that. Otherwise, the communiqué has no other footnotes or other reservations.

Now, we will answer your questions.