

Comments by HR at the Press Conference Following the Meeting of the Steering Board of the Peace implementation Council



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Thank you all for coming today.

The meeting of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board concluded 30 minutes ago.

As you know, the members of the new Presidency, as well as representatives of civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, took part in some of the sessions.

The communiqué should be with you very shortly, but I would like to give you at first hand a sense of what was discussed and agreed over the last two days.

Discussions were dominated by the fact that we have just marked fifteen years since Dayton and BiH has just

successfully held a general election and government coalitions are now being formed.

With regard to the Dayton anniversary, Steering Board members repeatedly stressed how far Bosnia and Herzegovina has come in what is a relatively short period of time.

The country has remained at peace – and no one should diminish the fundamental importance of this.

But while there was a real appreciation of the substantial progress that has been made since 1995 in implementing Dayton and establishing state-level institutions that are needed in order to make Bosnia and Herzegovina a functioning country, there was a clear determination – and this was again and again expressed as a matter of utmost priority – that the last four years of political stalemate must not be repeated.

That is why over the last two days the PIC was discussing the real priorities and challenges that BiH is facing today and how the international community can best facilitate progress in BiH.

Overall, the PIC had two consistent messages;

First, Governments need to be formed as quickly as possible; these governments coalitions need to agree an agenda that will put the country back on the path for Euro-Atlantic integration.

Second, that the political leaders who gained the support of the electorate in October now have the chance to demonstrate that they are responsible and committed to moving this country forward. They must seize this opportunity for a fresh start and show that they agree that further standstill is not an option.

The PIC took the view that BiH must get back on track in key policy areas including State and Defence property,

Constitutional reform and EU partnership requirements including the BiH census.

The PIC also made clear that the International community is ready to work on these issues with the political leaders that were chosen by the people of BiH.

The PIC agreed with my view that political rapprochement – in contrast to the confrontational politics of the recent past – is a prerequisite for progress.

In this regard, the PIC is well aware of what is going on in the region. It is obvious that Serbia and Croatia have set their sights on EU membership, and this has changed their bilateral relations and regional cooperation in a fundamental way.

We have seen some positive statements lately from BiH leaders, and the PIC encouraged the efforts being made the BH Presidency, and called on them to take an increased role in coordinating the institutions in BiH.

However, Bosnia and Herzegovina – which stands to gain most from this rapprochement in the region, has until now, gained least. The country's political establishment currently remains *behind* the regional curve.

So, while Dayton has brought peace and progress, the PIC agreed that, in the long run, EU membership offers the strongest guarantee that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina will achieve security and prosperity.

That's why we need to take advantage of the fresh start that the election has made possible. We need a change of approach and the PIC made this explicitly clear.

Governments need to be formed quickly and they need to be formed on the basis of how effective they can be.

This means more than negotiating the allocation of cabinet

seats – it means negotiating the allocation of cabinet seats to people who can work together in order to carry forward an ambitious and difficult agenda.

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The Steering Board discussed the findings of the Progress Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina issued two weeks ago by the European Commission.

You all know that the report was far from positive – it described limited progress...lack of a shared vision among government officials...and the possibility that Bosnia and Herzegovina is slipping into systematic violation of its international commitments.

Clearly, no one in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in the International Community can view this as a satisfactory record.

So the political strategy in this country has to change and now that the elections are behind us there is a chance to change it. The PIC expressed the hope that this chance will not be thrown away.

There was a clear consensus that visa liberalization was not just a warm welcome for BiH citizens to travel Europe; it also showed that Bosnia and Herzegovina *can* meet international conditions when its leaders make an effort to.

Bosnians and Herzegovinians need to make sure that their leaders want to do so more often.

The International Community and the EU have shown that they will respond positively when BiH leaders do the right thing.

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The PIC was very clear that constitutional changes need to be made in order to make Bosnia and Herzegovina work better.

Decision-making needs to be more efficient.

As a matter of priority, constitutional reform negotiations should produce agreement on ending the violation of citizens' rights identified in the Sejdic-Finci ruling.

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Let me conclude by explaining what this PIC was NOT about:

Discussions did NOT focus on OHR closure. They focused on the challenges that Bosnia and Herzegovina faces – challenges that are all the more serious and pressing today because of stagnation in the past four years.

So although the PIC reviewed progress on the 5 + 2 agenda, you will not find a breakdown of each condition and objective in the communiqué as was the case earlier.

As you know, in February 2008 the PIC defined five objectives and two conditions that must be met before the OHR can be closed.

This hasn't changed, nor has it been achieved. And it won't be done by the PIC. It has to be done by the men and women who are currently forming governments.

Members of the PIC were very clear that the issues facing BiH today are not the responsibility of the OHR or the IC but of this country's elected leadership.

OHR will close when all the conditions and objectives have been fulfilled.

In the meantime, the OHR will continue to work with BiH leaders, will ensure respect for the Dayton Peace Agreement, and will work alongside a reinforced EU presence.

Once again thank you for coming, and I believe we have time for one or two questions...

