High Representative addresses UN Security Council

The High Representative, Valentin Inzko, addressed the UN Security Council (UNSC) via remote video today and presented his regular semiannual report on the status of peace implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering the period from 16 October 2019 through 15 April 2020.

At the start of his address, the High Representative emphasized that, along with the rest of the world, Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently in the midst of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it is still too early to make a final assessment, it seems the country has so far managed to avoid an outbreak and a significant loss of life, but could not overcome some old hurdles that burden BiH's political life. "While both entities, the Federation and Republika Srpska, took appropriate and early measures, and initially showed preparedness to work together, including with the state level, the country ultimately has not succeeded yet in establishing a functional coordination mechanism to fight the health crisis and appropriately coordinate measures to deal with its economic consequences." High Representative also informed UNSC, that there is no ministry of health at the state level, but most importantly, there was a lack of coordination. As a result, there are currently different levels of measures applied in each entity, and so far it does not appear there is a countrywide plan to mitigate the economic setbacks, said the High Representative Inzko.

Moreover, one of the bigger challenges for the country is how to minimize the corruption challenge related to the management of international financial and material assistance, as well as the lack of political cohesion, which is most visibly manifested in the inability to reach a political agreement on the distribution of the IMF financial assistance.

The High Representative highlighted a hint of optimism stemming from the fact that the BiH Presidency has announced the launching of the process to implement the 14 key priorities in the European Commission's 2019 Opinion on BiH's Application for EU Membership. He wished every success for this endeavour in advance of the Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb, which also begins today

While speaking about the political situation and ongoing trends in BiH, the High Representative expressed his concern that some political parties might return to the pre-pandemic *status quo*, in which he emphasized decision-making blockages at the State-level by parties of the governing coalition in Republika Srpska who want to force a discussion on the removal of the foreign judges of the BiH Constitutional Court. The High Representative raised his concern that, "should the foreign judges leave the BiH Constitutional Court, some political parties that aim to dismantle the existing arrangements in BiH would de facto gain political control over the Court. In such case, they could enforce their separatist or third entity agendas with the assistance of the court." In this regard, there was strong support by several delegations for the continued presence of foreign judges in the Constitutional Court of BiH, but also the new Judge, prof. Angelika Nußberger from Germany.

Another pressing issue before BiH is the organization of the municipal elections in October. The High Representative voiced concerns expressed by the BiH Central Election Commission that, due to the failure to adopt the 2020 State budget, it may be unable to proceed with the necessary preparations. "We

are now in the month of May and we still only have a temporary budget. To have additional funds for the elections we need a regular budget and hope that such regular budget will be adopted by the end of May," warned the High Representative.

Furthermore, the High Representative noted that, while the Republika Srpska formed its government swiftly after elections in October 2018, the new Federation Government has not been appointed after more than 18 months. It is equally sad that the citizens of Mostar have been deprived of their right to vote in the local elections, and that the European Court of Human Rights' ruling in the Sejdic-Finci case remains unimplemented, both after more than a decade, which is unacceptable, especially in view of frequent commitments towards EU integration.

As a priority, the High Representative said that BiH must improve and consolidate the rule of law and the fight against the pandemic of corruption. He elaborated that the rule of law is the cornerstone of democracy and the functionality of any country. However, the rule of law is not only about adopting legislation but also implementing it. "It is an ongoing commitment, the state of mind, and a way of life," added the High Representative.

In his message to the international community, the High Representative reminded that "we should be patient with BiH and very cautious about changing the international setup in BiH. We should as the international community work together. Unity is our strength and the only recipe for success in our efforts to ensure the long-term stability and viability of the BiH state." The High Representative alluded also to the 75th anniversary of the end of WW II, which we are commemorating these days, and how precious peace is, and how former enemies France and Germany are now the pillars of European unity.

Click here for the full text of the High Representative's address.