Press Conference Following the Meeting of the Steering Board of the Peace implementation Council

Statement of the High Representative Valentin Inzko:
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you all very much for coming.

Our discussions among members of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council over the last two days have been concrete and comprehensive; we have dealt with issues such as the rule of law, education and economy – issues that directly impact the lives of BiH citizens.

The recurring theme of this meeting is that not only do we need to see progress.

We need to see progress now, and the message from this PIC is that the International Community will remain engaged with its partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina to help them deliver this progress.

There's a fatalistic view that – with just under a year to go before the next general election – not much can be achieved, since the parties have already started campaigning.

We in the International Community do not accept this, and I don't see why the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina should

accept it either. With a year to go before the general election, the governing institutions and the political parties need to get things done now.

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All of you are familiar with the slow pace of implementing the 5 + 2 agenda since February 2008. 5 + 2 is all about establishing solid provisions that will make it possible for this country to move forward, economically, politically and socially to the benefit of every citizen – yet agreement on key points has remained elusive. We believe that such an agreement is possible even before the next election.

The PIC was also briefed on the progress that has been made in negotiations on implementing the Sejdic-Finci ruling. The patient and constructive engagement of the European Union has provided an opportunity for the country to make real progress towards candidacy and membership, but we are still waiting to see whether the political leaders will take advantage of what is being offered to them and the citizens they represent.

Delegations also heard from the Chairman of the Central Election Commission about what needs to be done for elections to take place in October 2014. In this context, the PIC Steering Board called for the necessary changes to Article 9.3 of the BiH Election Law to be adopted as soon as possible and in full coordination with the Central Election Commission. This is urgent because the amendment will give the Central Election Commission the tools it needs in order to prepare and conduct the elections. This issue should not be folded into other amendments to the election law because it is qualitatively different.

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Another important theme of our discussions was the respect for the rule of law. Over the last few years, there is an increasing tendency for political consideration and expediency to override the Rule of Law – this must end. We have already

seen very negative consequences for the citizens – for example the postponement of the elections in Mostar in 2012.

Respect for the rule of law includes respect for the Dayton Peace Agreement, the constitutional framework and, importantly, the obligation to implement decisions of the Constitutional Court of BiH.

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The PIC Steering Board also reiterated its full support for an independent and professional judicial system at all levels in BiH.

Attempts to exert political pressure and influence on these institutions are unacceptable. The PIC Steering Board expressed particular concern about continuing efforts to undermine the authority of state-level judicial institutions

Justice and accountability for war crimes and genocide are essential components in the process of reconciliation for the victims and communities in BiH. Therefore, the European Court for Human Rights decision in the Maktouf-Damjanovic case and its impact on the judicial processing of these heinous crimes must not be misused for political purposes as we have seen recently. The PIC Steering Board expressed strong concern in this regard.

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Delegations today also emphasized the importance of education for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Political Directors were briefed on the issue of the school in Konjevic Polje, including yesterday's first meeting of the new school board and adoption of new rules of procedure. A lot of energy has been invested to deal with the issue by all sides – but not all the efforts were made public. I hope that enough progress can be made by local actors in coming days so that the remaining children can return to school as soon as possible and get a proper education. Getting

all children back to school is the aim of the International Community.

At the same time, the protests of parents from Konjevic Polje and Vrbanjci are a reflection of the wider issues that need to be addressed through a long-term strategy in the education field. In this context, the PIC highlighted the urgent need for competent authorities throughout BiH at all levels to advance decisively with education reform aiming at improving education standards, based on the principles of non-discrimination, non-segregation and inclusiveness. We were reminded that BiH, when joining the Council of Europe in 2002, committed to eliminating discrimination and segregation in its educational system. Eleven years later, it has failed to take significant steps to do so, which will hold BiH back on its path to Europe. There was a strong view among delegations that the current educational system is failing to prepare young people to be competitive in a 21st century economy.

We urge the Conference of Ministers of Education to play a more active role and to create a more coherent legislative framework in the area of education throughout BiH, including an increased convergence of curricula, and to work to lift standards at all schools. PIC members affirmed their willingness to continue to provide support for schools in BiH through their existing programs

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In conclusion, let me say that in both entities leaders have displayed an unwillingness or an inability to make the political system work. Politicians in Republika Srpska have continued to challenge the authority of state institutions and question the territorial integrity of the country in their public statements. On the other hand, we have also heard inflammatory rhetoric. Moreover, in the Federation there has been a lack of urgency in agreeing on reforms.

Citizens in both entities have suffered because of delays.

Just a few months ago, citizens took to the streets right across the country to show their impatience with politics as usual. The message that has come out of this PIC is that the International Community will do everything possible to help BiH's citizens realize their aspirations for a better future. But, as you all know, it's not for the International Community to solve problems in this country – that's the job of elected leaders. The role of the public is also to put pressure on the political leaders to deliver on their demands. The elected officials work for the citizens of this country, a concept that often seems lost on those officials.

Something that was discussed – and that has a direct bearing on the voice of the people – is the indispensable role of an independent media in publicising citizens' discontent. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs robust, free and critical media. There are constitutional and legal guarantees for freedom of speech, yet we have seen leaders try to silence criticism.

In the PIC Communiqué, we remind the authorities in BiH of the need to uphold international standards of media freedom. Public figures must refrain from attempts to intimidate media outlets. The International Community stands shoulder to shoulder with BiH journalists who are working, often in very difficult conditions, to uphold the right of citizens to speak out.

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I will now hand over to my Principal Deputy Tamir Waser, who will brief you on Federation issues and our discussion on Mostar.

Statement of the Principal Deputy High Representative Tamir Waser:

Mostar

There is widespread dismay among PIC members at the ongoing failure of political parties and institutions to meet their

obligations to implement the ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court on the electoral system for Mostar.

As a result of this failure, Mostar citizens continue to be denied their right to participate in municipal elections.

The PIC today underscored that local elections in Mostar should be held no later than October 2014. It also stressed that any party that fails to engage sincerely in seeking a solution will bear full responsibility for the continued denial of Mostar citizens' basic rights.

We also reaffirmed, as the parties themselves agreed last year, the core principle that Mostar must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic municipality, with some level of local authority/administration below that of the city.

There is a framework document on the table, agreed to by many parties earlier this year, but the two main parties in Mostar continue to refuse to negotiate on the basis of principles adopted last year. Instead, we hear unrealistic ideas like dividing up other cities in BiH or appointing a supervisor for Mostar. These are not serious proposals and only distract from the real work that needs to done. We remain ready to assist all the parties in Mostar when they are ready to engage constructively.

Federation Issues

More broadly, the PIC Steering Board called on the Federation authorities to redouble their efforts in the remainder of the current mandate to ensure the effective functioning of institutions. In particular, authorities in the Federation need to complete the necessary steps so that the FBiH Constitutional Court, including the Vital National Interest Panel, has the capacity to fulfil all its responsibilities.

Federation authorities also need to adopt amendments to the Law on Ministerial, Government and Other Appointments that

ensure institutional stability in the Federation. The amendments would affirm the continuity of office while providing mechanisms to resolve blockades in the appointment process.

Delegations further called on the Federation Parliament to adopt the Federation Law on Internal Affairs with the necessary amendments to ensure the independence of the police, including in budgetary matters. OHR, the EU and the US have worked closely with local institutions on these reforms. We further believe that the adoption of harmonised internal affairs legislation in the Cantons would further promote the development of independent and professional policing.

Finally, the PIC Steering Board welcomed the decision of the Federation Parliament to proceed with the initiative to reform the Federation Constitution so that this entity becomes more functional, cost-effective and responsive to the needs of citizens. There is a good set of ideas on the table from the group of experts, but parties can and should put forward their own ideas. I very much hope that parliament can take concrete action, including voting on various proposals, before adjourning for the summer and the subsequent campaign period.

Economy

PIC Steering Board members also received a briefing on the IMF stand-by arrangement in BiH. They strongly supported the efforts of the IMF to bring about fiscal discipline and structural reforms in the economy. They also supported the IMF’s continued use of conditionality to ensure implementation of these reforms as a means of creating jobs and raising living standards. These are the issues of greatest importance to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on a day-to-day basis.