

Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko to the UN Security Council

Check against delivery.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Let me begin by thanking this Council and its members for your continued attention to developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As I outlined in my report to the Secretary General, despite some positive steps taken by the leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards Euro-Atlantic integration, which I wholeheartedly welcome and support, the pace of real reform remains somehow slow and our common goal of irreversible stability for the country has not yet been fully achieved.

During the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina took an important step towards becoming a candidate country of the European Union, when the authorities handed over 20,000 pages of responses to the European Commission's Questionnaire in February. The country also managed to adopt several strategies and a package of excise tax changes which unlocked funding from the International Monetary Fund.

These important developments demonstrate that when the political leaders have a common goal, they make the necessary compromises and find a solution.

Unfortunately, such achievements have been few, as many of the most prominent elected officials remain disproportionately focused on nationalistic and divisive issues.

At the same time, the authorities and competencies of the state level are repeatedly challenged and undermined, in a way that contravenes the logic of integration with European

structures.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have reported in the past, irresponsible and inflammatory rhetoric challenging the fundamentals of the Peace Agreement is not new. But we have witnessed the worrisome escalation of such statements in the last six months.

As I have set out clearly in my report to the Secretary General, I am deeply concerned by the more recent readiness among some politicians to refer to the possibility of a renewed conflict, including controversial statements by senior Bosniak politicians suggesting that a rearming effort was underway to “respond” in case of a hypothetical war scenario.

These comments followed controversy earlier in the reporting period about the large-scale purchase of long-barrel, military type, weapons by the RS police and media exposure of nationalist extremist groups. There is a general trend of armament going on and this is a reason for concern. I will report about this issue eventually in November.

Inflammatory rhetoric has also continued to be used by some senior officials from Republika Srpska, denying the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina and advocating for eventual secession. Public comments were also made, glorifying convicted war criminals and calling for the return of an RS army. Some Croat officials have mused about the territorial reorganization of the country and threatened the dissolution of the state if the current electoral issues are not resolved to their satisfaction.

All public figures must choose their words carefully and responsibly. BiH is a single, multiethnic, sovereign state, consisting of two entities, in which all citizens – the three constituent peoples and Others – live and work together, and

elected officials above all have a responsibility to contribute to peace and reconciliation.

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It is within this overall political climate that Bosnia and Herzegovina is entering another election cycle.

Six months ago, I briefed the Council on the risk of a deeper political crisis following the October elections, if the parties do not agree before then on the rules for indirect elections to one of the chambers of the Federation parliament – the House of Peoples.

Following a decision by the Constitutional Court in 2017 striking down provisions of the election law on this issue, the state-level parliament needs to adopt amendments to the law. Otherwise the formation of authorities after the elections could prove extremely difficult or even impossible.

The European Union and the United States are currently working to facilitate an agreement between the main political parties on this issue, and my Office supports them in this effort. But the ultimate responsibility lies with political leaders. A range of possible solutions exists which can accommodate a compromise, if the main parties are willing to step back from maximalist demands and negotiate in good faith. But time is running out.

As I speak, the Central Election Commission has announced the holding of General Elections on October 7, although there is no solution for the House of Peoples in place.

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Another area of concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the deterioration in the rule of law.

Prominent elected officials continue to ignore or reject the final and binding decisions of state-level courts and

corruption is prevalent in the political system.

These two elements came together in a recent case concerning the state-level judiciary. In July 2017, the BiH Constitutional Court declared as unconstitutional several provisions of the BiH Criminal Procedure Code.

As the deadline of six months has passed without the BiH Parliament correcting the issue, the Court could soon rule on non-enforcement, leaving the BiH judiciary without the tools necessary for fighting organized crime and corruption.

It is unfortunate that some political parties object to the adoption of amendments in line with international standards. And it is very telling that the parties which oppose that are those same parties which challenge the state-level and the current arrangements in the Federation BiH.

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I also need to highlight once again the fact that citizens in Mostar are still deprived of the basic democratic right to elect their local representatives – something they have not done in ten years – due to the failure of the parties in the Parliament to implement a decision of the BiH Constitutional Court related to the Mostar electoral system.

However, I am encouraged by the fact that representatives of several political parties in Mostar have started meeting on their own initiative in Mostar, in what appears to be a sincere attempt to finally resolve this issue.

I urge the parties to reach a compromise that would enable the citizens of Mostar to enjoy the same democratic right to elect their local leaders as the citizens in the rest of the country enjoy.

Additionally, I wish to recall another long-pending Constitutional Court decision and related High

Representative's decision, which deal with the equality and constitutionality of Serbs in the Federation, and which still need to be reflected in three of the cantonal constitutions after more than 15 years. This means that Serbs are not equal and they do not have the same rights in these three cantons. They are not even mentioned in the constitutions. Here we also have a Constitutional Court decision which has not been respected.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina requires the continued attention and unity of effort by the international community.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made enormous strides since the end of hostilities in 1995, in the building of its institutions and the establishment of security and normalcy.

But we must not take this progress for granted.

While the leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain committed to integration with the European Union, this has not yet had an effect on the day-to-day political climate, in which some political figures are all too ready to use irresponsible rhetoric and seem predominantly concerned with maintaining their positions.

The risk is that this divisiveness and sense of unease about the future of the country slowly seeps into the fabric of society. And we should not forget the risks of nationalism and extremism on all sides, combined with a growing sense of socio-economic stagnation in the country.

It is for this reason that I believe the international community needs to urgently increase its efforts aimed at promoting reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the

region. The United Nations, alongside others, is well placed to play a prominent role in such efforts.

Beyond this, there needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country. It needs to come from the politicians themselves, but we as an international community, individually and collectively, have an interest in encouraging this change.

To begin with, in the current environment, we need to maintain all of the tools at our disposal to prevent any further deterioration of the situation. I am thinking here about the civilian and military executive mandates.

I also believe that we should be ready to be more prescriptive about the reforms that are needed to take the country forward and more ready to respond against words and actions by leading political figures when they risk further destabilizing the political and security environment.

And finally, I would appeal to us all, as an international community, to be united in our approach and coordinated in our efforts. After all, we share the same goal: a sovereign, united and decentralized, but also stable and functional Bosnia and Herzegovina. I believe we all wish to see Bosnia and Herzegovina as a shining example of tolerance and trust, where a traditional common life of all cultures, nations and citizens is possible.

Thank you.