

Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko to the United Nations Security Council



Sr. Presidente, miembros distinguidos del consejo de seguridad, señorías,

Es un privilegio el estar aquí hoy para informar a este consejo sobre la situación en Bosnia y Herzegovina, un país en el cual el compromiso y la unidad de la comunidad internacional sigue siendo crucial para alcanzar nuestro objetivo común que no es otro que una paz y seguridad sostenible en los Balcanes.

These days are special for Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it will celebrate 25 years since its admission as a full-fledged member state to the United Nations, along with Croatia and Slovenia, on 22 May 1992.

But these days are also special for my home country Austria as it was presiding the Security Council in the month of May, exactly 25 years ago.

The then Austrian Ambassador Dr. Peter Hohenfellner, as President of the Security Council, on 20 May 1992 proposed to this august body to adopt a Decision recommending to the General Assembly that Bosnia Herzegovina be admitted to the United Nations.

At the same meeting the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution Nr. 755 (1992) endorsing this recommendation.

Upon this historic recommendation, Bosnia Herzegovina was admitted with General Assembly Resolution Nr. 46/237 without vote, 25 years ago, on 22 May 1992 as a member of the United Nations.

I wish to use this occasion to congratulate Bosnia Herzegovina wholeheartedly and I am very glad that – as predicted 25 years ago – Bosnia and Herzegovina has made a significant contribution to the work of the organisation, most recently with its successful tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, but also with its peace keeping forces worldwide.

Before making my remarks today, as it is my first opportunity, I would also like to take a moment to express my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Ambassador Vitaly Ivanovic Churkin, who made such a dramatic impact on the work of this esteemed Council over many years. He was also involved in the talks on former Yugoslavia as a special representative of the President of the Russian Federation.

Since I addressed this Council six months ago, Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued in its commitment to making progress along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, while also continuing to face internal challenges to its sustainable stability and advancement.

On the positive side, BiH authorities formally received the EU Questionnaire in December and the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU took place that same month.

I wholeheartedly welcomed both developments and have consistently called upon the BiH authorities at all levels to

maintain their focus on the EU agenda.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the EU, under the capable leadership of EUSR Lars Gunnar Wigemark, towards assisting the Bosnian authorities in achieving their aspirations for integration with the Union. Equally significant are the efforts of Enlargement Commissioner Hahn and of High Representative Frederica Mogherini, who is inviting the Balkan leaders next week to an important regional meeting in Brussels.

Equally encouraging was the consensus and forward-looking pragmatism demonstrated during the reporting period by the BiH Presidency in adopting the so-called Defense Review of military forces last November, an issue which had been outstanding for quite some time.

This is one of the requirements for Bosnia and Herzegovina in its efforts to participate in the NATO Membership Action Plan.

And on the regional level, bilateral cooperation and overall reconciliation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia has continued to improve, in large part due to the committed engagement of Serbian Prime Minister and soon to be President, Aleksandar Vucic, and also through the efforts of the BiH Council of Ministers Chair Denis Zvizdic.

Good co-operation between Sarajevo and Belgrade, and also between Sarajevo and Zagreb, has manifested itself through joint government sessions and through the visit of Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic to Mostar.

Despite all these positive developments, Bosnia and Herzegovina also saw some significant challenges over the last six months.

First and foremost was the political controversy between

Bosniak political representatives and Serb political parties over whether BiH should submit a request for revision of the International Criminal Court's 2007 judgment in the genocide case of BiH vs. Serbia.

This issue split Bosniak and Serb parties and officials within the state-level coalition to an extent not seen for many years, delaying progress.

Two different legal interpretations on whether the BiH Presidency needed to renew the mandate of the BiH agent to the Court before submitting such a request proved to be irreconcilable, increasing tensions within the Presidency.

The now former agent of BiH to the International Court of Justice Sakib Softic submitted the request for revision to the ICJ, which later proved even more controversial when it came to light that the Court had already notified him that a re-nomination of the agent by the BiH authorities would be needed.

The situation was ultimately resolved when the Court made its decision on the non-admissibility of the request, but the overall dynamic whereby leading politicians focus disproportionately on ethnically divisive issues, while showing little urgency in addressing the need for real reforms, is a serious cause for concern.

The second negative trend during the reporting period surrounded the activities of the RS authorities to implement their unconstitutional referendum, including ostentatious celebrations of the 9 January holiday with the participation of some Serb members of the BiH Armed Forces.

In addition, during the reporting period, some Croat politicians have intensified calls for the "federalization" of BiH, which was understood by some to imply the further ethnic division of the country into three to four "federal units," one of which would have a Croat majority.

Increasingly, the authorities in BiH appear unable to act even in their own self-interest in a win-win situation, for instance in addressing the commitments made under the International Monetary Fund's arrangement with BiH.

The continued failure to meet the IMF prior actions for the completion of the first quarterly review will hold back significant international assistance to the country's fiscal stability and economic development.

In this regard, I would like to express my praise and support for Francisco Parodi, IMF Resident Representative to BiH, for IMF's ongoing efforts at encouraging meaningful structural reform in BiH.

Furthermore, the situation with regard to rule of law in the country continues to deteriorate. Corruption is a serious problem, and continued challenges to the state-level institutions, like the BiH Constitutional Court and the Court of BiH, contribute to the further weakening of the rule of law.

Finally, during the last six months, the frequency and intensity of the Republika Srpska President's public remarks advocating for secession have lessened, although the "independent status" of the Republika Srsпка remains part of his party's official platform and only this week he publically expressed his certainty that such an independence referendum will eventually take place.

The lessening of such rhetoric follows the imposition of financial and travel sanctions against the RS President by the United States. This reaffirms to me that we as an international community can have an impact when we are ready to send a strong message to authorities and leaders who openly reject the rule of law and reopen the wounds of the past: that they are leading themselves and their constituencies into isolation.

In sharp contrast to divisive rhetoric are the efforts of high school students in the historic city of Jajce, who, with their determination and perseverance, prevented the partition of their high school, based on ethnic segregation, as planned by some political parties.

Equally encouraging is the news today from Srebrenica, where Bosniaks and Serbs, Muslim and Orthodox students, celebrated their high school graduation together. They stressed, "We are all human beings. With our common festivities we would like to demonstrate our mutual respect and will for reconciliation. This is the last and most realistic message out of Srebrenica." They emphasized unity, love, and a common future.

Looking ahead, Bosnia and Herzegovina will have its next General Election in the Autumn of 2018.

With the difficult period surrounding the ICJ crisis and the celebration of the RS day over, political discussions in BiH will now most likely focus on amendments to the BiH Election Law.

Thus far no consensus has been reached on this issue, which has the potential to create a new political stalemate in the country.

Having in mind that some eighteen months remain before the elections, I would strongly encourage the current authorities to make the most of the forthcoming period and demonstrate to voters that they are able to look past divisive issues and deliver meaningful reforms to improve the economic situation in the entities and throughout the country.

Foremost on this list should be economic reforms demanded by the country's international creditors, as well as EU-related issues, in order to open the early possibility of future EU candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I also expect the authorities in BiH, foremost the parties represented in the state parliament, to finally resolve the legislative vacuum which has prevented the citizens in Mostar from electing local representatives since 2012. This will require compromise on all sides and willingness to resolve issues pragmatically.

Finally, it is simply unfathomable that more than seven years after the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the current electoral system discriminates against individuals not belonging to one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's three constituent peoples, a considerable number of citizens are still denied the basic right to stand for public office on the basis of ethnicity.

The authorities in BiH must correct the discrimination identified in the so-called "Sejdic-Finci" and related cases as a priority.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Six months ago I described two parallel trends in Bosnia and Herzegovina: positive advancement in Euro-Atlantic integration and a negative tendency to flaunt the rule of law and focus on divisive backward-looking issues.

With the continued support of the international community, the elected representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina can make progress and ensure that the first trend becomes the dominant one, but they will need to refocus.

In the meantime, the International Community should retain all the instruments at hand. We need to be mindful of the fact that BiH is a complex political and security environment, where negative scenarios can quickly endanger the Dayton Peace Agreement and the progress achieved after Dayton.

For this reason, I am firmly convinced that there is still the necessity to maintain the EU military force on the ground with an executive military mandate, and I fully support its extension when the Security Council considers this issue in November.

EUFOR is a relatively inexpensive but necessary investment in peace and stability in the Balkans.

In my view, it provides an essential baseline of physical and psychological security that supports the EU, my Office and other international organizations in pursuing our common goal of sustainable peace and prosperity for BiH and its people.

Recent scenes witnessed in the parliament of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remind us of how quickly an incident can escalate in the Balkan countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the progress BiH has made in the last two years in pursuit of EU candidate country status, the country still faces fundamental challenges.

As we enter the third decade of peace implementation, it cannot be assumed that BiH is on a glide path to a *“peaceful, viable state irreversibly on course for European integration.”*

This will require continued attention and commitment from the international community and in this regard I would like to thank you for your continued attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The international community cannot deliver the changes needed to bring Bosnians and Herzegovinians greater prosperity, stability and membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Only the leaders and institutions can do this.

But we can – and in my view we must – continue to offer institutional support and a vision based on integration and functionality.

In addition we must be firm in upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing a framework of stability and respect for the Peace Agreement.

In these things, our commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its wonderful and talented people remains unwavering.

Thank you.