

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



Check against delivery.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Security Council, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In six months' time, when I next appear before the Security Council, Bosnia and Herzegovina will be marking the twentieth anniversary of the Dayton/Paris Peace Accords. At the beginning of July, we will also be marking the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide.

Much has been achieved since that all-important day in November 1995, when Richard Holbrooke finally succeeded in brokering an agreement to end Europe's most tragic conflict since the end of the Second World War.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has come a long way since then, but it is also true that what happens during the next six months will play a hugely significant role in determining how the 20th anniversary of Dayton will be viewed by the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Peace is of course a priceless commodity. It should never be taken for granted. But it is the base, not the end state.

It is entirely right that after twenty years the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – especially the young – expect so much more from their country and their politicians. They are suffering from the highest youth unemployment rate in Europe and many of them are leaving the country.

They are right to expect more, because Bosnia and Herzegovina really does have the potential to offer its citizens prosperity and a normal way of life.

I take this opportunity to encourage you to visit this beautiful land, to see for yourselves its spectacular landscapes and its rich cultural diversity.

So what needs to happen in the next six months so that we can mark the 20th anniversary with a sense of renewed optimism about the future and even more importantly so that we can re-energise the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

The answer is very simple. We need to see the newly elected authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina – and the country in general – coming together to deliver the steps that are required to take advantage of the new EU initiative for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The good news is that we now have governments in place at the State and Entity levels that are showing signs that they are ready to start implementing the written commitment that was adopted in March and that has opened the way for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU to enter into force.

However, progress will require concrete results to be delivered. Some of the reforms will be very difficult, but they will deliver new opportunities for the country and its people.

Specifically we need to see concrete results that will:

- create new jobs,
- improve the functioning and functionality of institutions and
- entrench the Rule of Law, especially when it comes to the fight against crime and corruption.

I believe that a great deal can be achieved in 2015 if there is a renewed commitment within the country and among its political leaders to pull together and to work together, to work as one.

This is what we need to see and we need to see it quickly so that the new governments can build up a real momentum of reform.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been given a fresh chance and it must be taken!

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank foreign ministers Hammond and Steinmeier for launching the initiative that has given Bosnia and Herzegovina this fresh chance.

I also want to thank High Representative Mogherini and Commissioner Hahn for taking the initiative forward.

A new EU Special Representative, Ambassador Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, has recently joined us in Sarajevo and I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome him and to once again express my strong commitment to working hand in glove with him to assist those citizens and politicians who want to move the country forward.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The initiative offers Bosnia and Herzegovina the chance to end years of stagnation and to get the country back on track to the brighter future we all want for its people.

However, we need to recognize there are no guaranteed outcomes.

Is there an alternative? Of course there is.

That alternative is to continue doing what we have seen over and over again. The alternative for the country's politicians is to continue practicing the politics of the past that has been driving the country ever deeper into crisis at the expense of all its citizens, especially the young.

I must be frank with you – there are some politicians who may be tempted to follow this negative and dangerous path. As I made clear in my report, there have been negative developments over the last six months that included direct challenges to the Peace Agreement.

Of particular concern was the Declaration adopted by the RS National Assembly on 17 April that directly challenges the authority of the BiH Constitutional Court.

A second example is the Declaration of the ruling party in the RS from 25 April. While it is only a party document that has no official value, I am nevertheless concerned by its threat to hold an independence referendum in Republika Srpska in 2018.

So the problem has a name. It is referendum. And the problem also has a date. It is 2018.

As I have made clear repeatedly, the Peace Agreement does not grant the Entities the right to secede, and any attempt to change the Peace Agreement requires the agreement of all the parties.

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A week after submitting my report, Bosnia and Herzegovina was rocked by a shocking incident when a lone attacker killed one police officer and injured two others at a police station. I

take this opportunity to again offer my condolences to the family of the police officer who lost his life in the line of duty. I also wish a speedy recovery to the two injured police officers.

The response of the authorities was swift and it will be important that we see ever closer cooperation between authorities at all levels, inside the country and in the region, to tackle a wide range of law enforcement challenges facing the country, including the ongoing fight against terrorism, which as we know is a global change.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude my remarks today: an opportunity is on the table from the EU that offers the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina a chance to ensure a prosperous and dignified life for themselves and their children.

This is the time for the country's politicians to decisively look to the future in the interests of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the young.

This is the moment when the country needs to finally say farewell to the politics of the past and to decisively commit to a new way of doing politics that puts the interests of citizens firmly in first place.

This is truly the time for Bosnia and Herzegovina to come together and to work as one.

I very much hope the visit of the Pope in June to Sarajevo will help to foster a sense of unity in the country.

I can't stress strongly enough – this opportunity must be taken!

If we see hard work and results in the weeks and months ahead

then we will be able to look forward with real optimism when we come together to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Peace Agreement in November.

There are politicians and people in Bosnia and Herzegovina who want to work together in good faith to take the country forward.

They must have our full and proactive support in the months ahead.

The drawing of borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina is behind us. Division and secession are failed strategies that were defeated twenty years ago. Their place is in the history books.

God forbid that anyone should seek to reactivate these dangerous strategies. If they do, they will need to be dealt with firmly and decisively. In this respect I will continue to take my responsibilities under the Peace Agreement with the utmost seriousness.

As more and more people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region and indeed beyond now fully understand, the future of this part of Europe is re-integration from within and integration with the wider continent. This is the era not of division, but of renewed bridge building.

The expanding force of forward-looking people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is getting ever stronger by the day.

And what a positive force it is as it crosses ethnic and religious lines and re-energizes the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to work together to build a better tomorrow.

We – the International Community – are duty bound to recognize the importance of this moment. We must do all we can to help the forces of positive change in the country to reach their “surge capacity”.

I must add, however, that the International Community's support for OHR is, in fact, waning, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to fulfill my mandate. Now is not the time for us to lose focus or resolve, and I ask for your full support as we help BiH to move along the EU path.

Let us do all we can in the next six months to help these peoples to seize the opportunity the country has been given by the EU so that 2015 is remembered as the year Bosnia and Herzegovina turned decisively to the future.

I hope this is what we will achieve so that we can mark the twentieth anniversary of the Peace Agreement with a sense of genuine optimism about the future. This is what I hope to report to you when I return in six months.

Thank you.