

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



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Mister President, Distinguished Members of the Security Council, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Before starting my speech, I would like to express how pleased I am that good people such as Ambassador Rycroft who was present at Dayton 20 years ago remain engaged in our common effort to take Bosnia and Herzegovina from war to lasting peace.

On 21 November, we will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords, the peace treaty that brought Europe's most brutal war since the Second World War to an end.

As a seemingly endless column of migrants and refugees makes its way through the Western Balkans, we are reminded of the human tragedy of war and of just how priceless peace is.

The peace that Dayton brought was hard won and it must never be taken for granted but instead cherished and consolidated.

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

Anniversaries provide us with an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved and to take stock of what remains to be done.

So allow me to briefly recap what was achieved, primarily during the first ten years after the war, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was the “shining star” of post-conflict peacebuilding and re-integration.

Freedom of movement was established; a million refugees reclaimed their homes, for the first time ever after such a brutal conflict; the state Government was reinforced; the economy was stabilized; and the state judiciary was established.

Three armies and three ministers of defence that had fought each other were brought together under state control and a single Ministry of Defence; a single intelligence service was created to the highest European standards; a unified Customs service was created and is working effectively; a single currency and a single indirect taxation system was established, which underpins the state’s finances; and free, generally fair and peaceful elections had become the norm.

In 2005, Bosnia and Herzegovina stood as perhaps the best example of what the wider International Community can achieve when it is united in its commitment to a peace effort.

There may be a need to do this again elsewhere in the world and it is worth remembering how successful we were in Bosnia and Herzegovina when we were truly united and committed.

However, over the last ten years, the country has not been moving in the right direction. This has been a disappointment for the international community, but most of all for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As we enter the third decade of the peace process, we need to raise our expectations and once again see concrete results and

positive momentum.

I believe major progress is possible in the next ten years if we see two basic ingredients:

1. The political will to deliver substantial reforms to take the country forwards.
2. An unwavering commitment to fully respect the Peace Agreement

This will not be easy, but it is absolutely necessary, because the problems Bosnia and Herzegovina faces today are deep-rooted and systemic, reflecting the complex bureaucracy, the weaknesses in the economy and to be frank, the vested interests some political leaders and state-run enterprises have in a dysfunctional status quo.

What is necessary is to implement a programme of serious political, social and economic reforms that will improve functionality, attract investment and create jobs. If this is done, the International Community, through the IMF, World Bank and others stands ready to provide generous assistance to help the country get through a challenging period.

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The period since my last address has seen some decidedly positive developments, as you will have seen from my last report, as well as some serious difficulties, including those highlighted in the special report I submitted on 4 September.

First the positives, of which there have been several:

- A written commitment with the European Union was signed and adopted by the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities in February, opening the way for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU to enter into force on 1 June.
- State and Entity authorities adopted ambitious and

coordinated reform agendas in the social and economic spheres, a major step forward.

- Under the astute guidance of EU Special Representative, Ambassador Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, we have also seen some more concrete initial results to implement the reform agenda, the most notable of which was the adoption of a new Labour Law by the Federation authorities.
- A border treaty has been signed with Montenegro, an achievement of genuine regional significance. I very much hope that similar treaties can finally be signed with Bosnia and Herzegovina's other neighbours.
- And just last week we saw a long awaited joint session of the governments of the Republic of Serbia, under Prime Minister Vučić, and Bosnia and Herzegovina under Chairman of the Council of Ministers Zvizdić, in Sarajevo.

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Given these positive developments, reflecting a genuine commitment to get the country back on track, it is difficult to understand how in parallel we have seen some politicians determined to challenge the Peace Agreement and destabilize the situation in the country.

In my last speech to the Security Council, I raised my concern about the adoption by the ruling party in the Republika Srpska of a Declaration that threatens to hold an independence referendum in 2018. While it is only a party document that has no official value, I am nevertheless concerned by its threat to hold an independence referendum by a specified time.

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.

Since then we have been confronted with a more immediate and

official challenge to the Peace Agreement and the long-term progress we are all so eager see.

I am referring to the decision by the RS parliament in July to organize a referendum on whether the RS authorities need to respect the authority and decisions of the country's central judicial institutions; as well as decisions taken by High Representatives to implement the peace agreement.

The 28 members of the European Council said clearly in their 12 October conclusions that, quote, "The holding of such a referendum would challenge the cohesion, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It would also risk undermining the efforts to improve the socio-economic situation of all Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens and to make further progress in EU integration."

The decision of the RS National Assembly has yet to be published and to enter into force. There is still an opportunity to rectify this breach of the Peace Agreement and I expect the RS authorities to step back from the brink and put the Referendum aside.

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So where does the reform effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina stand right now, just over a year after the latest general elections?

The fairest description is to say that that this is the end of the beginning. The next few months will be critical because they will reveal whether the authorities are committed to delivering on their own reform agendas. Some of the reforms will be difficult, but they will deliver new opportunities for the country and its people.

The challenge for Bosnia and Herzegovina is not just one of WHAT needs to be done. It is also a challenge of HOW things are done. Twenty years after Dayton, there is no denying the

fact that the country all too often suffers from division. This is why it is so important that the country get back to advancing reforms in a way that fosters reconciliation and reintegration.

Bosnia and Herzegovina desperately needs to come together and to work for a common purpose.

In this respect I would like to commend some of the “gesture politics” displayed by the State Presidency and Council of Ministers, which has been so warmly welcomed by ordinary people. This is the positive leadership citizens want to see and we need to see much more of it.

In this regard, I would also like to commend the unprecedented moves made by Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic in pursuit of genuine regional and ethnic reconciliation. Indeed tomorrow Prime Minister Vucic will in a welcome development visit Srebrenica again.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years after our mission to bring lasting peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina began, there is no doubt we have come a very long way. Huge progress has been made.

However, we can conclude with equal certainty that we have not yet completed the job.

The future for Bosnia and Herzegovina is the EU, not because I say so, but because this is what the democratically elected authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have consistently set out as their primary objective. As some suggested the last time I was here, this has not been forced on the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a choice they have made themselves.

To the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina my message is

this: a sincere and genuine offer is on the table from the EU that provides a chance for a secure, prosperous and dignified life for current and future generations.

This offer must be seized with both hands.

For international policymakers, I would highlight two things we need to do in order to ensure success in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- The first is to continue to assist the country to maintain and accelerate the positive momentum that the EU has been helping the local authorities to build in recent months.
- The second is that we must stand up together to real challenges to the Peace Agreement, like the referendum initiative in the RS.

The drawing of borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina is behind us. No matter how hard some may try, division and secession are failed strategies that were defeated twenty years ago.

The 20th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords should remind the international community and the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina of just how far the country has come and how much more can be achieved if we reinvigorate our commitment to a peaceful and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the interest of all of its peoples, its neighbors and the whole of Europe.

Thank you.