Remarks of the HR Valentin Inzko at the Conference “20 years of the Dayton Peace Accords – Views”

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

It is always good to be in Banja Luka, especially when there is an opportunity to have a frank discussion on how we can get Bosnia and Herzegovina back to work and back on track towards full Euro-Atlantic integration.

I am looking forward to today’s discussion, but allow me to start with a two basic points which, in my capacity as High Representative, I need to make not only clear, but crystal clear.

One – The Peace Agreement is an international treaty which the authorities of this country are obliged to implement and respect, not when they feel like it, but consistently and without fail. We continue to see serious and direct challenges to the Peace Agreement such as the referendum that has been initiated by the RS President.

This must stop and the RS referendum must be put aside.

Two – Ongoing attempts to misrepresent the very fundamentals of the Peace Agreement to achieve political objectives must also stop.

I have a clear mandate as the final interpreter of the civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement, which includes the

constitution of this country.

In this regard, I want to be very clear again here today: Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a State Union of the two entities as some have suggested. The entities do not have sovereignty and they do not have the right to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina achieved international recognition as a sovereign state in 1992, and was admitted as a UN member state already on May 22, 1992.

The Dayton Peace Agreement clearly states that Bosnia and Herzegovina, which underwent an internal reorganization in 1995 under the terms of the agreement, is the continuation of the sovereign state recognized in 1992. So under the peace agreement the State alone, not the entities, possesses sovereignty.

The sooner we stop expending time and effort on issues that were resolved long ago, the better for all.

Far too much time has been wasted over the last ten years trying to undo the progress of the past instead of making a decisive effort to build on what was accomplished during the first ten years after the war, when the Peace Agreement was being implemented to the benefit of all.

Focusing on division and conflict, rather than on how to use the framework at hand to build a successful and prosperous country, has had dire consequences for the people of this country, including the people in the RS.

Those who seek to prevent this country from functioning, so that they can turn around and point to this dysfunction as a justification for their separatist agendas, are doing the people of this entity and this country, especially the young people, a disservice.

While they safeguard their political and personal interests behind a hopeless promise of division, young people are getting older without the personal benefit that living in a functional system would provide.

The bottom line is that this approach has failed.

The time for calculating has run out. To use a basketball metaphor “you have used up the clock.”

What is required now is a fundamentally new approach to politics that puts citizens first and that is committed to the principle that healthy compromise is a strength and a win-win approach for all, not a weakness.

Very simply put: this country doesn’t require centralization, it is not centralized and it never will be, but it must pull together and it must reintegrate and work as one. We need more functionality.

Some of you will say that is impossible.

My answer is that it is possible, because it has been done before.

Remember the huge successes that were made when the country came together and believed that it could make decisive progress towards the EU.

Huge progress was made to implement the Peace Agreement and to build a platform for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s accelerated membership into the Euro-Atlantic family. Look at just a couple of the examples, which despite a great deal of effort to suggest otherwise were not enacted by my predecessors, but with overwhelming support from the authorities of this country.

Take the Indirect Tax Authority for example, without which the fiscal crisis in the country would be much deeper than it already is.

The total amount of indirect tax revenue that the ITA has collected since it became operational in 2005 has reached some 56 billion KM. This is an impressive result, which shows to what extent the ITA benefits all levels of government in the entire country and thus also works in the best interest of all of its citizens.

Another example of a success story is the BiH Armed Forces, which have shown what this country's professional soldiers are capable of, be it abroad on peace missions or at home savings lives in the terrible floods of 2014.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no going backwards. The Peace Agreement will not be unwound. This is not an option. Forget it.

The only option is to continue to reform, to utilize the opportunity provided by the Peace Agreement to take Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens through peace to lasting stability and indeed prosperity within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic family.

This is not a pipe dream – it is absolutely possible if you pull together as a country.

"Time waits for no man," the saying goes. Not even in this country.

For this generation of politicians, time is clearly running out to prove that they are part of the solution.

Future generations won't wait forever. Some have chosen simply to leave and many will continue to do so if things don't change.

But others won't leave the country to secure a better life. They will make their voices heard and demand a better life at home, along with so many others who are tired of this way of doing politics.

So please, no more calculating.

A few weeks ago we saw what the people of this country are capable of, when a talented group of young basketball players came together from across this land to conquer Europe in the U16 Europe Championship. And there are many such examples.

Just imagine how much of a better place this country would be, if its elected leaders followed the people’s lead, by articulating and implementing a vision in the interests of all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to quote a famous slogan, “Just Do It”.

Thank you.