

Speech by High Representative Valentin Inzko at the University of Graz

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying what a pleasure it is to be back at the University of Graz.

As High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina I am particularly pleased to have an opportunity to speak here. There is, of course, a very long-standing connection between this university and the academic and cultural life of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This connection is built on a history of exchange between students and teachers. It is also based on the recognition that there are invaluable cultural affinities between Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is important when it comes to understanding Bosnia and Herzegovina's present effort to complete its post-war recovery and restart the stalled process of Euro-Atlantic integration.

I have been asked today to address the following questions:

- The Dayton Peace Agreement brought an end to the war, but did it bring lasting peace?
- What should be done to consolidate peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Let me address the first question and return to the other question a little later.

I. The Dayton Peace Agreement

Despite the difficult circumstances in which it was drawn up, the treaty has kept the peace for sixteen years. This is an

important achievement.

At the same time lasting peace – in a country and between countries – is organic. It develops through complex social, cultural, economic and political steps. A single treaty cannot substitute for this long-term and often challenging process.

A treaty can however create the space in which to deliver lasting peace. And I believe the Dayton Peace Agreement has that potential. The Dayton Peace Agreement creates a space in which peace can grow organically; a space in which the country's institutions can develop into a functioning modern democracy and work towards providing citizens with security and prosperity.

Of course, for this to happen, for the Treaty to be able to fulfil that potential, the political leaders of the country need to look to the future – while respecting the past – and work towards implementing the Treaty.

This is where the mandate and role of the High Representative comes in: the office of the High Representative was created to oversee the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

In the difficult years of the aftermath of the war, the High Representative was also given the so-called Bonn powers: the right to remove from office public officials who violate legal commitments and the Dayton Peace Agreement; and to impose laws essential for the implementation of the Peace Agreement if Bosnia and Herzegovina's parliaments fail to do so.

All of this was decided by the international community in the interest of having the Treaty fulfil its potential and provide the space in which peace can grow organically.

II. Current Challenges

For a while, there was progress. Looking back over the post-

war period, we see a clear progression of reform that began in 1997 and continued until 2005. During that time BiH was given the prospect of accession to the EU and membership of NATO. By the end of 2005, the reform momentum had become strong enough that many thought it was irreversible. The International Community decided that a less interventionist approach was preferable, one that focused in particular on the incentives of EU integration.

Unfortunately, despite the opportunities still offered for Euro-Atlantic integration, many of the country's politicians have taken the easier option of revisiting the past, reverting to nationalist agendas rather than working towards the future. The political rhetoric became harsher, and politicians started refusing to compromise, avoiding dialogue on crucial issues and ultimately misusing the system.

In early 2006 BiH experienced a serious set-back: the rejection of the so-called April Package of constitutional reforms that had the potential to make the country politically self-sustainable.

Since then, political developments have worsened. They include the inability on the part of the political leaders to deliver the most basic functions of government, a return to unfortunate practices of the past, and direct challenges to the Dayton Peace Agreement, the constitution and the rule of law.

Let me give you the most recent example of the political leaders' inability to deliver the most basic functions of government.

It has taken over fifteen months for a state-level government to be formed. And all the while, other basic tasks and functions of government are left in limbo. I am speaking about adopting a global fiscal framework and a state budget, adopting measures to promote economic growth and stimulate

employment, adopting measures which ensure progress towards EU integration, and completing the steps necessary to enable the start of the country's NATO Membership Action Plan.

With the recent announcement that a deal has been struck between political leaders there is hope that this agreement will lead finally to the election of a new state government and a resolution of the budget issues. But this remains to be seen.

An illustration of political leaders reverting to the practices of the past is the predominance of politics over the instruments and the resources of the state.

Political parties and leaders still attempt to exert their influence over the police, the judiciary, public administration, public broadcasting, publicly owned companies, etc. This is in spite of the laws in force, despite considerable investment by the international community. Party political control over public institutions runs contrary to the requirements of a modern democracy.

But the most worrisome developments are the challenges to the Dayton Peace agreement, the Constitution and the rule of law, including statements by officials in support of state dissolution and chauvinistic comments directed against other ethnic groups.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long history of people of different origins, cultures and convictions living together. People here are for the most part decent. People for the most part would rather get on with their neighbours than focus on their differences. But much of the current political activity and public rhetoric of the country's leaders does not recognise this reality.

III. What should be done to consolidate peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

So, I come to the second question. In view of all this, what should be done to consolidate the peace?

We need to remain engaged. I believe disengagement by the international community would provide opportunity to those who want to weaken the state, which in turn could lead to renewed disorder.

We need to keep promoting dialogue between the parties. No matter how far apart the starting positions of the parties may be when people talk – issues get resolved. When there is silence – nothing happens. Dialogue and healthy compromise must be the rule rather than the exception.

We need to speak with one voice. The only way to counter the divisive nationalist agendas of some political forces is for the international community to show a strong united stance both in its positions and its actions.

My office and the EU have two distinct mandates, two distinct roles but support the same objectives for BiH. By ensuring respect for Dayton and by extension ensuring stability, the Office of the High Representative provides an environment where the EU and other international organizations can fulfil their mandates.

We need to speak clearly in favour of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The Dayton Peace Agreement creates the space in which peace can grow organically; the space in which the country's institutions can develop into a functioning modern democracy and work towards providing citizens with security and prosperity. In this context we need to underline the importance of the rule of law, as the basis of any progress.

We need to speak clearly in favour of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The process of Euro-Atlantic integration – even at the present pace – alters the body politic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it has done with every other member state. Eventually, this will tip the balance in favour of progressive

social and political forces.

IV. Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is still work to be done by the international community in meeting its commitment to help BiH recover from the war and achieve a lasting political settlement that will ensure a durable prospect for peace.

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – who have had to endure so much for so long – display a remarkable capacity for problem-solving in everyday life.

The International Community must stand in solidarity with the citizens of this country. Our continued commitment to and focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina is the way to reach our common objective – a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is stable and safe and that is able to solve its problems institutionally as it moves towards full Euro-Atlantic integration.

Despite the current difficulties, I believe that this course will deliver success in the long run.

Thank you.