

Bosnia and Herzegovina must stay committed to progress

Thank you very much, Mr President and thank you to both of our briefers this morning.

I'd like to begin by thanking the High Representative and his team for this thorough report. While we would all prefer to see local actors taking responsibility to deliver a secure, peaceful and sustainable future for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office of the High Representative continues to play an essential role. It has the United Kingdom's full support, including for the use of executive powers should the situation require it.

As the High Representative makes clear, Bosnia and Herzegovina, like nearly every other country, is battling the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been impressed with the discipline and solidarity shown by the authorities in undertaking this immense and ongoing task, and welcome the political and institutional leaders' sense of unity in tackling this common problem. We stand ready to support Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the High Representative in this joint challenge.

Mr President, over the past six months we've been pleased to see the problems of blockages in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be overcome. Firstly, with the long awaited agreement in December last year to form a stable government, one which will continue Bosnia and Herzegovina's cooperation with NATO. Secondly, with the ground-breaking agreement on socio-economic reforms that will directly benefit all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's assistance.

The Joint Presidency's agreement on 28 April on a process that leads to Bosnia and Herzegovina implementing the EU Opinion's, recommendations on human rights, democratic values and the rule of law was a further demonstration that Bosnia and Herzegovina can work towards a positive future.

Mr President, all of these moves are important for advancing Bosnia and Herzegovina's prospects for Euro-Atlantic future. We urge politicians to engage constructively in this process, which will achieve far more for the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina than the unconstructive threats of a political blockade, which we have recently seen in relation to foreign judges sitting on the Constitutional Court, a core Dayton institution. It is good to see that despite these threats, the court continues to function. These threats merely make the ending of international supervision even harder. The UK underlines the importance of the Court and welcomes the arrival of the new judge, Angelika Nussberger to bring significant expertise.

Mr President, we also urge leaders to use this moment of unity to complete the formation of the Council of Ministers and to convene the authorities at all other levels following the October 2018 elections.

Later this year, local elections were scheduled to take place. While we must

see what is possible given the COVID-19 situation, let us not lose sight of the shame that elections for the city of Mostar have not taken place since 2008 – as the High Representative has highlighted today – violating citizens' basic rights, as the European Court of Human Rights has said. As set out in the 28 April agreements, it is imperative that Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently takes all necessary steps to ensure that the elections are held in Mostar this year.

By implementing the recommendations in the EU's opinion, Bosnia and Herzegovina has said that it would address all outstanding European Court of Human Rights judgments, most notably the Sejdic-Finci ruling, and ensure that all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens can exercise their fundamental democratic rights and participate equally in their country's future.

Rule of law reform is at the heart of this agreement, too. As Judge Priebe's report flags, it is essential the problems are tackled and the fight against corruption continues. It is vital that politicians address this without further delay.

I would like to congratulate the Office of the High Representative for its work in Brčko District. Through its coordinated work with the international community, it has promoted good governance, infrastructure developments and private sector growth. This is a good model for reform.

Mr President, this year marks 25 years since the General Framework Agreement for Peace was signed, bringing an end to hostilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I'd like to take this opportunity to reiterate the UK's unwavering support for the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important that Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community find ways to appropriately mark this anniversary and promote a safe and secure environment and a positive and prosperous future for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also, for Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is important to find ways to revitalise and increase efforts to make the 5+2 agenda.

This year is also the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. We need to come together to remember the genocide and all victims of the horrific conflicts that occurred in the Balkans in the 1990s. We must ensure that nothing like it ever happens again. It is deeply concerning that the glorification of war criminals continues on all sides, which makes the prospect of lasting reconciliation even more elusive. It is unacceptable that individuals and sections of society, including politicians, continue to deny the genocide in Srebrenica, despite its qualification as genocide by two international tribunals as well as domestic judicial bodies.

Mr President, I'd just like to briefly address the point raised by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation regarding UK archives. As the Permanent Representative mentioned, the UK National Archives recently released papers relating to Bosnia and Herzegovina dating back 25 years as part of the UK's ongoing commitment to transparency. The UK's committed position the genocide was committed in Srebrenica is unequivocal. The authoritative judgment on what happened in Srebrenica and elsewhere, the place to look is the rulings of the international courts. The ICTY had

thousands of witnesses and the transcript extends to millions of pages.

Mr President, the UK continues to support reconciliation efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans more widely, including through our projects and our role in the Berlin process.

In conclusion, Mr President, the continued pursuit of narrow political interests by those in power and their reluctance to compromise has cost Bosnia and Herzegovina dearly. We hope the recent developments can be a catalyst for a new approach.

The COVID-19 crisis is affecting us all. Bosnia and Herzegovina's responses are helping to mitigate the problems. Political leaders are now taking this opportunity to move forward on reforms so that Bosnia and Herzegovina comes out of the crisis stronger with the support of its partners. We call on Bosnia and Herzegovina's politicians to demonstrate their commitment to progress, to look forwards and not backwards, and to act in order to provide the positive future that their citizens so very much deserve.

Thank you, Mr President.