

Speech: Committing to Peace and Security in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Thank you very much indeed Mr President and thank you to the High Representative for your briefing today and for the work of your office to maintain peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has long been a very important issue for this Council. Almost a totemic issue, if one goes back to the start of the conflict in the early 1990s. For the United Kingdom's part, we remain committed to the continuing role the High Representative and your office. The OHR as it's known remains the final authority regarding the civilian implementation of the peace agreement, and this includes our support for the use of the Bonn Powers if the situation requires.

We welcome the unanimous adoption of the resolution today, which authorizes EUFOR Althea or a further 12 months. This resolution demonstrates the United Kingdom and the international community's commitment to security in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The OHR, Mr President, and also EUFOR Althea, are crucial vehicles to allow the international community to support the maintenance of Bosnia and Herzegovina's security, stability and territorial integrity, which are vital to the country's future as a modern, democratic European state.

As I said Mr President, there was once a time when this Council dealt with Bosnia every day of its existence. I have had the privilege of working on and off on the Balkans file for over 20 years. I feel some depression at what the High Representative tells us about how some issues are still not resolved and how they repeat themselves. But I also want to point out that the hard-won peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina is fragile and it shouldn't be taken for granted. While the current situation remains calm, threats to security remain alongside new challenges, such as an increase in migration, as the High Representative mentioned.

It's a very important issue for the EU and for Europe. It's our regional crisis, if you like; it's something in which the EU has invested a huge amount of time and effort, money and coaching and patience, and we will hear later from the EU ambassador who will be able to set this out more clearly. But I just wanted, Mr President if I may, to address briefly what the Russian ambassador said, speaking before the vote. Russia is a member of the contact group and a member of the steering group for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We would much rather see Russia trying to do everything it can to consolidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state to help modernize and to help it make progress towards those Euro-Atlantic institutions that have been, since Dayton, the foundation of its existence as a modern state in its region, Europe. And I think that would be the best service that we could all do Bosnia.

I'd like to turn to the elections. The UK welcomes the calm and orderly

conduct during these elections which were genuinely competitive, but we continue to be concerned by the level of ethnic division in politics and by report irregularities and the inability to resolve key issues of election reform prior to the elections was disappointing and it's an ongoing concern. And the divisive and nationalist political rhetoric that was especially loud out in the run-up to the elections is dangerous and it creates an environment where real long-term security and stability will be difficult to achieve. It's also backwards-looking, Mr President; what Bosnia needs most of all is to move forwards. Other countries in the Balkans regions are moving forward. They're making progress on their EU accession arrangements. Where they wish to, they are making progress on getting closer to NATO. This is benefiting regional security and stability and once again Bosnia and Herzegovina risk being left behind from this regional modernization and progress. In particular, those in positions of responsibility should act in the interests of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than spread divisive sentiment. I want to echo what the High Representative said about waiting until these leaders have taken office before we properly hold them to account, but I also want to set out that we will hold them to account. Political leaders need to show leadership. They need to sow tolerance. They need to help modernize their country. As a crucial time post-elections, political leaders must work together in a cooperative manner to form governments quickly so progress can be made on key reforms and on Euro-Atlantic integration and the 5+2 agenda. These reforms are important because they will bring improvements to the day-to-day lives of Bosnian citizens – all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens. They are also important, Mr President, because they help embed national and regional security and stability, an issue that as I said at the beginning has long occupied this Council.

Those in positions of responsibility should act in the interests of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is especially concerning this rhetoric and a reluctance to compromise is indicative of the wider political environment. We will be watching these developments closely.

It's also important that political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently address all judgements around elections to ensure all citizens have the ability to participate fully in the democratic process as they all deserve. And it's regrettable that many of these issues have remained unresolved over several election cycles – a significant amount of time. Any resolution to these issues needs to meet international standards and uphold the principle of equality for all citizens, and this includes the ability to elect officials and to be elected.

Conversely Mr President, we welcome the progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina on certain aspects of reform. For example the adoption of agricultural and energy strategies and the eventual adoption of the criminal procedure code. Although the delay in doing so was regrettable, we also welcome the continued cooperation on women, peace and security, and encourage this to continue.

Finally Mr President I want to echo what the High Representative said about reconciliation. Srebrenica remains the worst massacre in Europe since the

Second World War. Nine thousand Muslim men and boys were taken from their homes and they were murdered. It is absolutely vital Mr President that reconciliation efforts are made in genuine earnest and that they are accelerated.

Thank you very much.