

Speech: “On too many occasions this year, Bosnia’s leaders have returned to the divisions of the past instead of delivering for the future.”

Statement by Stephen Hickey, Counsellor at the UK Mission to the United Nations, on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thank you Mr President.

Let me join others in welcoming back Dr Inzko to the Council and by thanking him for his report and briefing. You have the United Kingdom’s continued support in your role as High Representative and we’re grateful for all the work that you do for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people.

Looking back over the reporting period, it’s clear that 2017 was full of promise for Bosnia and Herzegovina; the EU accession path lay ahead, finally unblocked after years of inertia, and the reform agenda had begun to deliver the jobs and growth that so many cried out for when they took to the streets in 2014.

And yet, as the High Representative’s report makes clear, narrow interests, whether personal or political, have instead set back progress this year and dampened the prospects and potential of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On too many occasions this year, Bosnia’s leaders have returned to the divisions of the past instead of delivering for the future. These setbacks have only served to distract attention away from much needed progress on the reform agenda; reforms that would promote greater security, stability and prosperity across the country.

We saw this clearly in the celebrations in the Republika Srpska on 9th January. The referendum on the National Day was in clear defiance of the Bosnian Constitutional Court’s authority and in direct challenge to the Dayton Peace Agreement. The participation of Serb members of the Bosnian armed forces raised tensions even further, and underscored the urgent need to implement the Defence Review.

In addition, the continued efforts of Bosnian Croat politicians to advocate for electoral reform this year have also distracted attention from the reform agenda and much needed socio-economic reforms. We’ve seen economic legislation blocked and delayed because leaders have chosen to act in the interests of one of the constituent peoples, and not in the interests of all of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s people.

And finally, we’ve seen the Bosniak member of the Presidency undermine trust in the ruling coalition by unilaterally and unsuccessfully launching a

revision of the legal case accusing Serbia of complicity in wartime genocide. This sort of backward looking divisive politicking has no place in 2017.

Mr President,

There is still time for Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders to deliver this year. Through the reform agenda, they have a clear map charting the way ahead. It's a path that will lead to growth and stability, but one that needs renewed commitment and engagement. It's a path that remains central to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership; an aspiration shared by so many across the country.

And yet it's still a path not yet taken, and that has not been without cost. Over \$75 million of IMF funding was delayed last week by the failure to adopt the law on excise duties. Over \$1 billion of further IMF funding is now at risk.

As my Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson made clear during his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina last month, it is long past time for Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders to work together in order to deliver the reforms that will enable the country to compete and thrive in the modern global economy.

We've seen in the past months that they can find common ground. The successful re-run of elections in Stolac show that the authorities can deliver for the people. But it's also clear that until national interests trump narrow interests, stability in Bosnia will not be entrenched, and our concerns about the political and security situation will remain.

Because continued divisive rhetoric and repeated political crises only put pressure on the country and distract from much needed reforms. So we share the High Representative's assessment that the EUFOR mission, with an executive mandate, remains vital. We will therefore support the retention of this crucial asset when its mandate is up for renewal in November.

Thank you.