

Threats to re-establish Republika Srpska army risk undoing Dayton Agreement

Thank you Mr President. I'd like to start by congratulating Mexico on assuming the presidency this month and wish you all the best. I'd also like to congratulate Kenya for a very successful presidency in October.

Mr President, I would like to join other Council members in welcoming the adoption just now of a resolution that renews the authorisation for the EU stabilisation force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR ALTHEA, for a further 12 months. As the High Representative states in his recent report, the present turbulent environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlights the vital role of EUFOR ALTHEA in safeguarding peace and security, enabling the High Representative to fulfil his mandate and providing reassurance to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although this is by necessity a simple resolution, it rests on the great body of existing resolutions and other documents of this Council which set out the Council's position in full.

Mr President, although the new High Representative, Mr Christian Schmidt, is not with us today, we would like to thank him for his candid and thorough report on implementation of the Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was circulated to Council members pursuant to the requirements of the Dayton Agreement and Council resolutions. We look forward to welcoming him to the Council in upcoming meetings.

The High Representative's report paints a very worrying picture. We note his view that Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing the greatest existential threat of the post-war period and heed his warning on the real prospects for further division and conflict.

In particular, we share the deep concern of other Council members at the divisive rhetoric and actions pursued in some quarters of Bosnia and Herzegovina, notably by representatives of the Republika Srpska entity. Although these activities predate the 22 July amendment of the BiH Criminal Code by the former High Representative to sanction denial of genocide and war crimes and glorification of war criminals, the amendment appears to have provided a pretext for an escalation since then.

As the High Representative points out, these activities, including threats to re-establish a Republika Srpska army and to pull out of other established state-level institutions, represent an attempt to withdraw the Republika Srpska from the constitutional order established under the Dayton Agreement. These moves seek to undo 26 years of hard won peace and progress. As such, we agree with the High Representative's assessment that these actions amount to an attempt to engineer secession from BiH. This endangers not only the peace and stability of the country and the region, but threatens an undoing of the Dayton Agreement itself.

In light of the political situation in BiH, it is more vital than ever that the Security Council makes clear its ongoing support for the full implementation of the Dayton Agreement. In addition to the military role of EUFOR, this includes the civilian role of the High Representative.

We would like to join others in expressing our support for the new High Representative, Mr Schmidt and for the use of executive powers should the situation require it. We reject attempts to undermine his appointment and close his office prematurely. This is not in the interest of the people of BiH but undermines regional security and BiH's objective of Euro-Atlantic integration. As agreed by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, and repeatedly reaffirmed by Council members, completion of the 5+2 agenda remains necessary for closure of the office. We urge the BiH authorities to recommit to achieving progress and welcome Mr Schmidt's proposed initiative to reinvigorate the process.

And we urge the entities and all citizens of BiH to harness the spirit of the positive developments in the High Representative's report, such as the mutual visits between the city mayors of Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka and Tuzla.

Mr President, as a member of the Security Council and the Peace Implementation Council, the UK remains committed to supporting the security, stability, democracy, prosperity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We stand with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina in their hopes for a peaceful and bright future.