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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7688th meeting

Thursday, 5 May 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Aboulatta	(Egypt)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 26 April 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/395)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 26 April 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/395)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/395, which contains a letter dated 26 April 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the forty-ninth report of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I now give the floor to Mr. Inzko.

Mr. Inzko: When I addressed the Council six months ago (see S/PV.7555), we were on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement. That was an opportunity to mark how far Bosnia and Herzegovina had come, but also to recognize that there was much more work needed to ensure lasting stability and a better future for the people of that beautiful country. The signifance of that event was also underlined by an important conference held in Dayton, Ohio, in which former United States President Clinton, one of the peacemakers 20 years ago, participated.

Against that backdrop, on 15 February the country took the historic step of applying for membership in the European Union. Bosnia and Herzegovina chose its direction clearly, and that direction is a future in the European Union. Of course, transition is a process and not a event, and the transformation that the country must undergo on the path to membership will make the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina better off. Accordingly, we are fully united in supporting the country in its European Union (EU) aspirations. What lies ahead for Bosnia and Herzegovina will undoubtedly be a challenging period, but it is one the country can navigate if all parties work together and fully respect the Dayton Peace Agreement.

As I stress in my report (S/2016/395, annex), developments on the ground over the past six months have been mixed. It remains unclear at what point we can say Bosnia and Herzegovina is irreversibly on course for Euro-Atlantic integration. On the positive side, as I mentioned, the country submitted its membership application with the European Union. Associated with this, the authorities have also taken steps to implement a reform agenda, including the adoption of new labour legislation in both entities. In this context, I would like to praise the significant efforts of the European Union Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Lars-Gunnar Wigemark. He has really gone the extra mile.

While the progress achieved by the authorities on the reform agenda is indeed very welcome, let us not lose sight of the need to accelerate the pace of reform. There must be much more urgency in the decision-making process. From the point of view of my mandate to uphold the Peace Agreement, I welcome the fact that the authorities of Republika Srpska have not taken further steps to implement a referendum on the authority of the State Court and the Prosecutor's Office and on the authorities of the High Representative, as that would be a clear violation of the Peace Agreement. That step is indeed welcome.

My current assessment is that although the referendum has still has not been officially withdrawn, it does appear to have been put aside. I must note, however, that various political actors have continued to advocate the organization of yet another entity referendum on the validity of a recent decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this context, I need to stress that the Peace Agreement explicitly states that the decisions of the Constitutional Court are final and binding.

In addition to efforts made to meet European Union requirements, I would like to commend the efforts of the authorities to register military properties to the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a condition for the activation of a NATO membership action plan and one of the prerequisites set by my Steering Board for the closure of the Office of the High Representative (OHR). I call on Republika Srpska authorities to enable the registration of such properties located on the territory of that entity, as the Federation has been doing. If Republika Srpska authorities are as keen to see the closure of my Office and my departure as they claim, then they need to deliver the results needed to enable the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board to take that decision.

Another largely positive factor has been the regional situation. Serbian Prime Minister Vučić's high profile commitment of notable donor funds to Srebrenica did much to foster reconciliation. By the way, he has personally visited Srebrenica twice. The very important first joint session of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of the Republic of Serbia in November was a very welcome and positive step forward. A similar joint session with the Croatian Government has been announced, and is also a positive development.

In the broader region, a decision was taken a few days ago in Zagreb by the Presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Turkey to reinvigorate the process of trilateral meetings among those three countries. I take this opportunity to encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbours to significantly increase the level of State-to-State cooperation, to the benefit of all sides.

Despite these positive developments, the forward momentum they created was diminished, regrettably, by a number of parallel developments during the reporting period. The readiness of some political actors to question and challenge the Peace Agreement, including new attempts to undermine the sovereignty and authority of the State and its institutions, continues to cast a shadow over positive efforts to advance economic and social reforms. Sharply divergent reactions to the verdict of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the case of wartime Republika Srpska President Radovan Karadžić highlighted the need for greater efforts towards reconciliation.

I was deeply shocked by the high-profile opening by the current Republika Srpska President of a dormitory named after Karadžić only two days before his first-instance conviction for genocide and crimes against humanity In our countries, it would be unthinkable to glorify individuals convicted of committing mass atrocities. With this act, the Republika Srpska President sent an insidious message to those affected by the horror and trauma of wartime ethnic cleansing, and put himself outside the standards and morality of the civilized world. I also take this opportunity to reject his thesis that fairness in transitional justice requires the prosecution of equal numbers of war criminals from different ethnic groups. We must seek justice for every innocent individual victim and his or her parents and relatives, but applying a principle of ethnic parity to mass graves or war criminals would do a disservice to victims and survivors of all nationalities.

The passing of time brings new challenges to all of us, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is no different. A terrorism-inspired act carried out by a single attacker in Sarajevo on 18 November resulted in the death of two soldiers of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attack once again highlighted the challenges facing the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fight against terrorism.

An additional issue of concern is the participation of some citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in foreign conflicts, some of whom have returned and could pose a threat to the future stability of the country. Additional incidents continue to occur that threaten to undermine inter-ethnic relations. For example, processions organized in March in Srebrenica and other municipalities by supporters of Vojislav Šešelj to celebrate his first-instance verdict of not guilty. This raised fear among Bosniak returnees who are still trying to come to terms with the crimes of the past.

Other direct challenges to the Peace Agreement during the reporting period included the conclusion reached by the Republika Srpska Government in December that the entity's institutions would cease cooperating with the State Investigation and Protection Agency, a State-level police agency, over a legally authorized raid on a police station in Republika Srpska in relation to war crimes investigations. While the Republika Srpska authorities eventually resumed operational cooperation under a signed agreement, that apparent interference of politics into police work

is unacceptable, in particular at a time when agencies need to be strengthening their cooperation.

The continued policy by representatives of the ruling party in the Republika Srpska, in particular its President, to advocate for the secession of that entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina troubles me deeply and raises fundamental questions about the commitment of some officials and political parties to fully respect the Peace Agreement. In that context, I remain concerned that that party's official platform includes a threat to organize an independence referendum in 2018 if certain conditions are not met. I take this opportunity to say once again that the Peace Agreement does not grant the entities the right to secede, and any attempt to change the Peace Agreement requires the agreement of all the parties.

In my previous report to the Council, and again today, I described the opportunity provided to Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders by the European Union and how critical it was for them to demonstrate that they were ready and able to deliver on the reform agendas they had set for themselves, while also fully respecting the Peace Agreement. That opportunity must now be embraced with both hands. What that means in practice is an acceleration of concrete results. When I next report to the Council, in six months' time, I sincerely hope that the authorities will have undertaken that challenge with greater urgency. Let us therefore together issue a challenge to the authorities to deliver on the following five points: first, publication of the results of the 2013 census; secondly, a final agreement on the EU coordination mechanism; thirdly, the full implementation of decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the rulings on the Mostar elections, State property and the 9 January Day in the Republika Srpska; fourthly, measurable progress on fiscal and economic reforms, including meeting the outstanding requirements set by the International Monetary Fund for a new arrangement; and, lastly, real progress on implementing the outstanding requirements for the closure of the OHR. For that to happen, political leaders will need to stop linking issues into ever-more complex and out-of-reach packages and put the needs of citizens first.

The year 2016 can be one of progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration, economic growth and job creation, but only if the country pulls together and works as one. Questioning and challenging the fundamentals of the Peace Agreement — which is also the Constitution — is not a formula for success. Given the complex environment that continues to prevail in the country, the presence of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina with an executive mandate remains of vital importance, thereby enabling my Office and others in the international community to fulfil our respective mandates, as well as reassuring citizens from all ethnic groups throughout the country of a safe and secure environment. I very much hope that in six months' time I will be able to report to the members of the Council a marked improvement based on the delivery of concrete results and a situation where there is full respect for the Peace Agreement. That is the surest way forward for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I would like to conclude today with some positive news, which offer encouragement in our efforts to ensure sustainable stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also serve to highlight the challenges. The first is a small, even trivial, example, but one of broader symbolic significance. Just a few days ago, several local associations agreed to create a single karate association for the whole country. But even that small step required 20 years of efforts towards reaching that goal. The second piece of news is of great significance. The day after tomorrow, the splendid Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, demolished in the war along with 15 other mosques in the city, will be reopened. That will be an event of broader significance for reconciliation and tolerance in the region and beyond, and a huge number of honorary guests are expected from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Turkey and elsewhere. It will be a very special moment not only for Banja Luka but for humankind as a whole.

On that positive note, I would like to thank the Security Council for its attention and continued support for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Inzko for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): It is our pleasure to welcome High Representative Valentin Inzko back to the Security Council and to thank him for his comprehensive briefing and report (S/2016/395, annex). As this is my first statement on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina after Ukraine assumed its non-permanent membership in the Council, I would like

to assure Mr. Inzko of our full support for his activities as High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union (EU).

First and foremost, we congratulate the Government and the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on their application to join the European Union. Ukraine hopes that historic decision will provide additional impetus for further progress under the General Framework Agreement for Peace. Ukraine welcomes the readiness of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to advance the reform agenda. We look forward to the conclusion of a final agreement between the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the adaptation of the trade provisions of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

Ukraine also praises the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Government aimed at the activation of the country's NATO Membership Action Plan. We support close cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO as an important factor of security in Europe. In that regard, we hope for the quickest-possible resolution of the issue of immovable defence property as the precondition to the country's Membership Action Plan.

Our meeting today is taking place at an important moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina. A little more than 20 years ago, the General Framework Agreement for Peace was reached at Dayton. A lot of work has been done, but yet after 20 years of peace we are still seeing serious political divisions inside the country.

As a positive sign of efforts to find a way to bridge the differences, we note the decision of Republika Srpska authorities not to hold the referendum on the State judiciary. However, the absence of an appropriate decision on the subject by the Republika Srpska National Assembly is a worrying sign. I would like to underscore that any referendum that contradicts the provisions of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the Dayton Agreement is illegitimate.

Ukraine shares the concerns of High Representative Inzko with regard to certain statements by Republika Srpska officials calling for that entity's secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We strongly condemn any provocative actions that could undermine the progress under the Dayton Peace Agreement and the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I once again reiterate our strong support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity, which is guaranteed by its Constitution and by international law, including the Charter of the United Nations.

Ukraine believes that more efforts could have been made to achieve more sustainable progress on the 5+2 agenda. We hope that, during the next reporting period, we will see long-awaited developments towards meeting the set of objectives and conditions. We believe that special attention should be paid to the issue of prospective defence property, in particular the registration of specific properties located on the territory of Republika Srpska. Other areas where progress would be highly welcome, in addition to implementing the *Sejdic-Finci* judgment, include the issues of the publication of the 2013 census results, the proper functioning of the coordination mechanism on EU matters, the implementation of the Constitutional Court's decision on Mostar and delivering on outstanding International Monetary Fund requirements.

Finally, I would like to underscore that, given the information we heard today from the High Representative, it is very important to overcome political differences in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to achieve tangible progress in implementing the necessary reforms, as well as the 5+2 agenda. Achieving all five objectives and the two conditions as quickly as possible would be the best way forward.

In our view, as we enter the third decade of the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council has an obligation to provide all necessary political support to ensuring the country's further peaceful development. It is of utmost importance that any attempt to encroach on Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity be resolutely addressed.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I thank High Representative Inzko for his briefing, service, representation of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and stewardship of the Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States again reiterates its strong support for High Representative Inzko's mandate under the Dayton Peace Agreement as the final authority with regard to the interpretation of the civilian implementation of the Peace Agreement. We of course look forward to the day when Bosnia and Herzegovina meets the objectives and

conditions established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative, but let us be very clear — that day has not yet arrived.

The United States commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's success is enormous, and our commitment to peace there enduring. It is in that spirit that we welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina's positive steps towards greater Euro-Atlantic integration. The submission of its European Union (EU) membership application in February was an important milestone, and I would like to congratulate Bosnia and Herzegovina on that step. The United States also welcomes the Government's full registration of 21 defence properties within the Federation, which is a positive sign of tangible progress to meeting Bosnia and Herzegovina's NATO Membership Action Plan.

Despite those positive steps, continuing down the path of Euro-Atlantic integration will require vision. It will require political will. It will require real follow-through on commitments, and it will require focus to meet the conditions set by the Peace Implementation Council. The United States joins the High Representative in his call for the registration of defence properties within the Republika Srpska and continued registration of additional properties within the Federation. We also continue to encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to make genuine progress on the EU socioeconomic reform agenda. As the High Representative noted, new labour laws in both entities are important steps towards improving the business climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina and making the country more competitive in the global market place. However, critical work remains to be done to enhance the rule of law, tackle corruption and improve the overall political climate in the country, which are steps that will benefit all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens.

Impunity and divisiveness are not acceptable. I am particularly disturbed by the truly outrageous and dangerously provocative decision to name a building in honour of Radovan Karadžić and the timing of the proclamation in advance of the ruling of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in his case. Honouring a man who has been charged with and, days later, convicted of genocide is despicable. Such craven political manoeuvres do a disservice to his victims and the country and undermine the spirit of peace and reconciliation needed for Bosnia and Herzegovina to move forward. The United States also remains deeply concerned by politicians who seek to erode the competencies of State-level institutions. In the interest of greater stability and security, we encourage the Republika Srpska National Assembly to formally withdraw its decision to hold a referendum on the State-level Court and Prosecutor's Office.

We look forward to the day when Bosnia and Herzegovina meets the objectives and conditions established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative, and when we can say with absolute confidence that Bosnia and Herzegovina has reached full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement and is now a peaceful, viable State irreversibly on the course for European integration. We have seen progress, but that day has not yet arrived. For instance, despite the recent surge and local engagement on Mostar, political leaders remain unwilling to make the compromises necessary for the city to hold elections for the first time since 2008. That same intransigence blocks progress on other fundamental issues, such as the release of the 2013 census data, and reflects on individual leaders' credibility with regard to Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders and all members of the international community to support the actions and reforms needed to reach that milestone and provide all necessary support to the High Representative as he fulfils his mandate.

Finally, I would like to just reiterate the High Representative's own sentiments in his report (S/2016/395, annex) in connection with the death of Mr. Roberts Owen. Mr. Owen gave of his own time and energy to serve as the Presiding Arbitrator of the Arbitral Tribunal for Dispute over the Inter-Entity Boundary in the Brcko Area, and we are grateful for his unwavering dedication to establishing irreversible peace and stability through his work at Dayton and on the Tribunal.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We welcome and thank Mr. Valentin Inzko for having presented the forty-ninth report of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (S/2016/395, annex) and commend his work in assisting in the building of the Bosnia and Herzegovina State.

We take note of the successes achieved and the challenges that lie ahead in consolidating Bosnia and Herzegovina's statehood and the future of unity and peace. As a declaration of principle, we reaffirm our

respect and support for the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and for the General Framework Agreement for Peace. In our statement, we will focus on three main issues: the general political environment, challenges to the General Framework Agreement and non-cooperation with the High Representative.

With regard to the general political environment, we are encouraged by the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for membership of the European Union. It is now our expectation that the political leaders will pursue efforts to meet the conditionalities of the reform agenda for the country's integration into the European Union, strengthening the prospects of a united, multi-ethnic, stable and prosperous country advancing towards development.

We welcome the adoption of the labour legislation as part of the reforms that the Republic was entitled to carry out and the disclosure by the Republika Srpska entity that the referendum on the jurisdiction of the Bosnia and Herzegovina State Court and Prosecutor's Office will not go forward. However, the failure by the authorities to reach solutions for a number of issues, such as the European Union coordination mechanism, the announcement of the 2013 census results and the implementation of the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court on Mostar, among others, are matters of concern.

The occurrence, during the reporting period, of a number of security-related incidents, including a terrorist attack resulting in the killing of soldiers, is a call to the authorities on the imperative need to adopt and implement vigorous measures and policies to counter terrorism, and namely to address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and the danger that they represent when returning home from theatres of war.

Another matter of concern were the reactions to the verdict of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the first instance against Radovan Karadžić, the war-time leader of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska, who was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and sentenced to 40 years of imprisonment, while Vojislav Šešelj was found not guilty for similar indictments. We condemn the outrageous incidents that occurred following the Court's decision and the ensuing security incidents that impacted the overall security situation in the country, undermining the fragile national reconciliation process.

Regarding challenges to the General Framework Agreement for Peace, most worrisome are the statements made by officials of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, the ruling party in the Republika Srpska, advocating for the secession and dissolution of the Bosnia and Herzegovina State. Such statements threaten the General Framework Agreement and the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, they undermine the cohesion of the multi-ethnic society being built in Bosnia and Herzegovina and of national reconciliation at a very crucial moment of the country's life.

We fully support the affirmation made by the High Representative that under the General Framework Agreement, the entities have no right to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country are guaranteed by the Agreement, the Constitution and international law. Concerning non-cooperation with the High Representative, we deeply regret the continued attacks on his Office, as well as the policy of Republika Srpska authorities of denying the High Representative access to official information and documents required to fulfil his mandate. The work accomplished by the Office of the High Representative in support of the peace, security and development of Bosnia and Herzegovina is highly commendable, and we recall that under annex 10 of the General Framework Agreement, all authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are duty-bound to full cooperation with the High Representative, as well as with international organizations and agencies.

In conclusion, we acknowledge the important role played by the European Union-led military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in supporting the country's efforts to maintain a safe and secure environment conducive to the building of a multi-ethnic society, a multinational State and a democratic country.

Mr. Bertoux (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina for his comprehensive briefing on the situation and for his work.

France aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

France welcomes the fact that the European perspective today serves as the main engine for the development and consolidation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its recent application to join the European Union reflects the overwhelming support of that

perspective within the Bosnian population, as well as the unanimity that exists around this topic within the collegial Presidency of the country. The Council noted these developments that in resolution 2247 (2015), the most recent resolution on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was adopted unanimously on 10 November.

In that context, the European Union will continue now more than ever to support the Bosnian and Herzegovina authorities in the implementation of reforms that meet the economic and social aspirations of the population. The reform agenda adopted last year is crucial to that end. We welcome the fact that it has already produced initial concrete results, such as the adoption of new labour legislation at the entity level.

Nonetheless, the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities must bear in mind that their candidacy is only the beginning of a long and demanding process that will require efforts at the central State and entity levels. It is especially important that a fully operational European coordination mechanism be set up as soon as possible, that significant progress be achieved in the implementation of the reform agenda and the Stabilization and Association Agreement, and that the country advance towards a judicial system that is fully independent, impartial and effective.

More than 20 years after their signing, the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords remain the cornerstone of stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will be up to the Bosnians themselves to ensure that, when the time is right, their institutions evolve. At a time when the country is facing elections, we call on all political forces to set aside divisive rhetoric that is as outdated as it is dangerous in favour of the construction of the future. Local campaigns should not pit one side against the other on the basis of hatred and rancour, but should lead to constructive discussion of political projects. Faced with mass unemployment, Bosnians deserve that priority be given to the economic development of the territories.

All Bosnians deserve the right to express themselves democratically in free and fair elections. As such, we remain concerned about the situation of the city of Mostar. Indeed, due to the lack of consensus between political forces, its inhabitants have been deprived of their most basic civil rights at the local level for nearly eight years. To accept such a status quo would be irresponsible. However, the only viable solution will be one that creates a consensus among local players. France therefore calls upon those local players to do their all to ensure that elections can be held this year, in respect for the principles reaffirmed by the Peace Implementation Council's communiqué of 2 December 2015.

We note with satisfaction the statements issued by the Republika Srpska authorities on the indefinite postponement of the referendum project, which could have challenged the competence of the central State in the judicial field. Whether it refers to the functioning of judicial institutions or public holidays, compromise solutions must be found. That is in the interest of everyone.

Today, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite its weaknesses, seems to be moving in the right direction of normalization. While there is no imminent risk of destabilization, the presence of the international community remains necessary at this stage. Its framework of reference remains, of course, the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords. We therefore call on all parties to cooperate with the institutions mentioned in the Peace Accords, notably the High Representative and the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The absence of manipulation and respect for the rulings of the Tribunal are crucial in order to prevent the revival of dangerous intercommunal tensions. We call on everyone to bear their responsibilities.

Our goal for the coming years remains, without undermining the fundamental principles of the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords, the fully adapt the international presence to current realities on the ground. The consideration of the reconfiguration of the Office of the High Representative should therefore continue.

In the 20 years after experiencing the horror of war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is today advancing in the right direction, with the support of the European Union and its other partners. The responsibility of the international community, including the Council, is to encourage it to continue along that path.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I would like to thank High Representative Valentin Inzko for his comprehensive briefing and for his latest report to the Council (S/2016/395, annex).

Malaysia takes note of the positive developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the reporting period, as outlined by the High Representative. We welcome

the country's submission of a formal application for membership in the European Union (EU) in February. That latest milestone reflects the continuing aspiration of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its leaders to European integration. We believe that the accompanying political and socioeconomic reforms required for EU membership would pave the way for stability and prosperity for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We therefore urge the leaders to remain steadfast in their commitment to implementing the country's reform agenda.

Malaysia also welcomes the positive developments in relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbours. That includes the ratification of the State Border Treaty with Montenegro, the visit by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, and the first-ever joint Cabinet meeting with Serbia in Sarajevo.

Despite the positive developments during the reporting period, the commitment of all parties to the Dayton Peace Agreement and to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina unfortunately remains in doubt. Malaysia is alarmed by the continuing challenges, through words and actions, posed by the leaders of the Republika Srpska to the Dayton Peace Agreement, the Office of the High Representative, and the State-level judicial institutions and authorities. Such challenges are clearly against the Peace Agreement, the rule of law and the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Malaysia takes note of the High Representative's briefing on the cancellation of the planned referendum by the Republika Srpska, which would have challenged the authority of the High Representative, as well as the country's rule of law and judiciary. While we welcome this latest development, we regret the fact that the referendum, together with other, similar threats, were called for in the first place. We strongly urge the Republika Srpska authorities to respect the country's Constitution, the various Security Council resolutions and the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Two decades after a devastating war, there is simply no place in the country or the region for divisive, provocative or secessionist rhetoric, which can serve only to perpetuate narrow political agendas at the expense of peace and stability in the region. We also condemn the intimidation, harassment and even death threats that have been directed at the High Representative and the country's international judges. Such acts are unacceptable and must cease immediately. The divergent reactions among the ethnic communities to the recent decisions of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia relating to Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj prove that reconciliation is still a distant vision. We call on all parties to respect the rule of law and use this opportunity to make progress on national reconciliation.

In conclusion, Malaysia reiterates the importance of intensifying efforts to fully implement the 5+2 agenda as prerequisites for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. Until then, Malaysia reaffirms its strong support to the Office of the High Representative, as laid down in the Dayton Peace Accords and upheld in various Council resolutions. We also recognize the important role played by the European Union Multinational Stabilization Force in ensuring security and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank High Representative Inzko for his briefing.

Recently, thanks to the collective efforts of the Government and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country has generally maintained stability. Its economy is improving and it has made some headway with the political process and the rule of law. China welcomes those positive developments. We respect the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and we believe that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have the right to independently determine their own path to development and their own foreign policy. The international community should respect the choices they have made for their future. China hopes that the members of all the country's ethnic groups will work actively to consolidate the positive results that have been achieved in nation-building, continue to fully implement the Dayton Peace Accords and promote improvement throughout the country on all fronts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important country in the Balkans. Maintaining peace, stability and development there is in the common interests of the entire international community, including all the other countries of the region. Where Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, the international community should adopt a balanced and prudent approach that fully respects the leadership and ownership of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and should be committed to promoting

unity among all ethnic groups in the country, harmony, sustainable economic and social development and lasting stability.

China supports High Representative Inzko in his efforts to fulfil his mandate and to work in a manner that will enable him to continue to play a constructive role in advancing the political process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. China is ready to work with the international community in continuing to contribute to achieving lasting peace, stability and development in the country.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I would like to join others in welcoming High Representative Inzko back to the Council. At the outset, I would like to reiterate the United Kingdom's full support for his role and I thank him for his briefing today.

Since we last met on this issue (see S/PV.7555), we have witnessed historic developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have marked 20 years of peace; we have seen one of the worst war criminals of the conflict brought to justice; and we have seen Bosnia and Herzegovina take steps to move beyond its painful history and seek a better future in the European Union (EU). But for all the progress of recent months, Bosnia and Herzegovina's path is not yet set. The United Kingdom sees two challenges ahead. The first is coming to terms with the past; the second is seizing the opportunity of the future.

In any post-conflict environment, coming to terms with the past is vital to building a peaceful future. One way of doing so is by ensuring accountability for past crimes. The landmark *Karadžić* ruling last month brought some welcome closure to one of the darkest chapters in post-war Europe. The verdict will never erase the suffering of the victims and their families, but it sent a powerful message to the world that perpetrators of atrocities will be held accountable for their actions, no matter how much time has elapsed.

Coming to terms with the past also means refraining from actions that reopen old wounds and deepen division. We recognize that others will be deeply disappointed at the *Šešelj* verdict, but we respect the independent judicial process and the judges' decision. As the High Representative has made clear, all parties and all peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina must do their utmost to advance reconciliation. In that regard, just like the High Representative, we welcome the fact that the Republika Srpska referendum on the State-level judiciary is off the table for now, though we regret that the decision to hold the referendum has not yet been formally withdrawn. Such challenges belong in a bygone age.

The same can be said of the continuing impasse in Mostar. For nearly eight years, the people of that city have been denied their democratic right to elect their local representatives, and no agreement has been reached on changes to the law that would enable elections to take place in October. With elections fast approaching, the time has come to make a breakthrough. The people of Mostar need to see positive leadership from all the parties in order to reach agreement as soon as possible, so that they can begin to look to the future. That is true across the country. After years of inertia, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a chance to look to the future, a future in the European Union and NATO. To make that a reality, all its leaders must now work together.

We welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina's renewed commitment to its EU path, as demonstrated by its application for membership earlier this year. We support the High Representative's call to leaders to intensify their efforts to advance reforms aimed at achieving that goal. They will need to work quickly to solve two issues in particular. The first is adapting Bosnia and Herzegovina's stabilization and association agreement to take Croatia's accession to the EU into account; the second is establishing a functioning coordination mechanism that will enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to speak with one voice to the EU on accession matters. We also believe that the population and housing census should be finalized and its results published without delay. We attach crucial importance to the census, not only because of its relevance to the integration process but also because of its instrumental role in economic and social planning. That is particularly urgent in the context of the reform agenda.

Ultimately, to seize the opportunity of the future, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina need stability and security. That means overcoming the threat posed by terrorism, and the United Kingdom expresses its condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the attack in Sarajevo in November. That attack highlights the challenge facing the Bosnian authorities in the fight against terrorism. We call on all those with authority and in positions of leadership at all levels to cooperate closely in order to prevent further incidents. More broadly, it is clear that stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still not yet entrenched, and

we remain concerned about the political and security situation. A serious breakdown in law and order could be catastrophic. We therefore share the High Representative's assessment that the European Union military mission, with an executive mandate, remains vital. We will therefore support the retention of that crucial asset when its mandate comes up for renewal in November.

I would like to end with this reflection. After a week spent discussing some of the world's most intractable conflicts in this Chamber, Bosnia and Herzegovina should give us hope that there can be a better future for those living in conflict today. But we cannot afford to take our eye off the ball. Let me therefore close by reiterating the United Kingdom's commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's future stability and its future membership of the European Union and NATO. We stand ready to support progress towards those goals.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his briefing.

Venezuela reaffirms its full support and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and believes that the international community must continue to support the implementation of the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a way to contribute to a peaceful solution of the differences among the parties concerned. In this context, the European Union-led multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina has carried out its work within the framework of the mandate assigned to it, in cooperation with the authorities, to ensure a safe environment for all the ethnic communities in the country.

We reaffirm that it is incumbent on the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to carry out and lead the efforts related to the future of their country, as part of a process through which ethnic groups must genuinely work through dialogue and with respect for the laws and institutions of the country, peace, human rights, cooperation and economic and social development. The High Representative should therefore foster constructive work as part of his primary responsibility for promoting the civilian aspects of the Framework Agreement. His efforts to move that work forward and find common ground among the parties, commensurate with the mandate that has been entrusted to him, must ensure impartiality and transparency, as well as a balanced and prudent approach in which the opinions and views of all stakeholders are reflected.

The strengthening of relationships among Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbours is a positive development, which we welcome. In that regard, we underscore in this process the ratification of the border treaty between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the high-level meetings with Croatian authorities in the context of dialogue and negotiation, and the positive visit to Srebrenica.

Moreover, Venezuela rejects terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, as well as the spread of extremism. In that vein, we deplore the murder of two members of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 18 November 2015 in Rajlovac, near Sarajevo. We also commend the steps that are being taken to avoid the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters to fight in the armed conflicts besetting the Middle East. Nonetheless, it is necessary to remain vigilant on this issue, which is so crucial to peace and security in the context of fluid international cooperation to confront the scourge of terrorism.

With regard to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the armed conflict in the territories that belonged to the former Yugoslavia, we once again publicly express our support for the work of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the body set up to try those responsible for such atrocities. The criminal tribunals have played a pivotal role in the strengthening of the rule of law and the promotion of long-term stability and reconciliation, and since their inception, they have been a vital tool for tackling impunity and ensuring that the perpetrators of the most serious international crimes do not escape justice. They have also paved the way for creating jurisprudence that serves as a source of inspiration for all national and international courts that are responsible or will be responsible for trying individuals accused of those crimes.

In conclusion, we reiterate our call on all parties to redouble their efforts to maintain their resolve and political courage, to build confidence and to develop their capacity to work together in the framework of international law, which are key elements of a just and lasting solution that redounds to the benefit of the parties and the entire region.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I want to thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina for his briefing. We have taken due note of it and of the content of his quarterly report (S/2016/395, annex). I would like to reaffirm to Mr. Valentin Inzko Spain's support for his work and the work of his Office.

As a State member of European Union, Spain aligns itself fully with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Twenty years have elapsed since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, which gives us an opportunity to evaluate the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a certain perspective in order to assess the success stories and progress that has been made, as well as the challenges that remain. We have taken note of the High Representative's assessment of the country's achievements in the last quarter towards compliance with the five objectives and two conditions established for the completion of his mandate and the closure of his Office. We reiterate our appeal to all political stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to redouble their efforts and continue to progress towards the achievement of all these objectives as soon as possible.

We very much welcome the positive role being played by the European Union-led peacekeeping force Operation Althea, which is supporting the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in maintaining security and contributing to their training and capacity-building. In the current context, the mission remains a necessary element in guaranteeing the country's stability. Moreover, we reiterate our full support for the work of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and its Residual Mechanism. We hope that their decisions and rulings will not be exploited along partisan lines by certain groups for the purpose of further exacerbating the tensions in the country.

Over the past six months, there has been a positive political environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, at the international level, has led to greater dialogue and cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, as evidenced in the border treaty with Montenegro. On the domestic level, this positive political environment has led to concrete reforms that allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue on its path towards full integration with the European Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership to the European Union is a very positive sign and needs to be assessed on its own merit, since, as I said, much remains to be done, such as continuing to implement the mechanism of interinstitutional coordination, adapting it to the Stabilization and Association Agreement and carrying out the reform agenda. We remain convinced that headway in all these areas will have a positive impact and lead to concrete improvements in the lives of all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the country's socioeconomic situation.

Among the pending issues that still need to be resolved is the publication of the results of the 2013 census, which is key to ensuring the smooth political functioning of the country. Of equal importance are the situation of Mostar and the attitude of the Republika Srpska authorities, as has been pointed out by the High Representative, with regard to such problems as the refusal to move ahead in registering State properties located on its territory

We are concerned about the divisive rhetoric of some political leaders and representatives, in particular of the Republika Srpska, where they continue to wield the threat of a referendum, which poses a real challenge to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and jeopardizes the system established by the Dayton Peace Accords. We must not lose sight of the fact that the political stability of the entire region depends to a large extent on the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Spain continues wholeheartedly to support the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also uphold the need for the political leaders of the country to respect the rule of law and the principle of equality in all their actions. That principle is an indispensable element not only of peaceful coexistence in the country, but also for constructive and cooperative relations with neighbouring countries. Respect for that principle is the only way that Bosnia and Herzegovina can make headway in its European integration process.

Ms. Schwalger (New Zealand): I thank High Representative Inzko for his briefing.

Since the Council last discussed the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see S/PV.7555), it has taken the significant step of lodging an application for membership in the European Union (EU). We wish Bosnia and Herzegovina well as it pursues an ambitious reform agenda, with a view to closer integration with the EU. The reform process will undoubtedly encounter

challenges and give rise to difficult choices. But it is clear that this programme of modernization will enable all citizens to reap the benefit of economic growth and strengthened institutions. The reforms also aim to increase employment opportunities, which is particularly important for youth, who are looking to contribute to a vibrant and prosperous society. We encourage the international community, especially neighbours in the region and the EU, to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in its reform process. With a reform agenda laying out a path forward, it is time for all political actors to look for ways to deliver it, and not to step backwards into divisive politics that have impeded socioeconomic progress for all of its citizens.

It is now over 20 years since the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina brought an end to the bitter conflict in the region. But, as we have seen in the Security Council over the past year, the wounds of the past are yet to fully heal. We urge renewed commitment by the parties and the international community to engage on the issues left unresolved by the Dayton Peace Agreement as they continue the process of national reconciliation.

Divisive rhetoric and talk of referendims challenge Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the Dayton Peace Agreement. That does nothing to move the country forward, and instead detracts from the reform agenda and undermines reconciliation efforts. The reconciliation process requires due consideration of past events and, where appropriate, holding individuals to account. We hope that everyone can learn to respect the conclusions of independent judicial processes, whatever their outcome. When court decisions are used as justification for inflammatory language and provocative actions, it simply sets reconciliation backwards. The process of administering justice should instead be used as an opportunity to move forward together. Not only should judicial decisions be respected, the judiciary itself should be able to operate freely with independence. We reiterate the High Representative's call for the judiciary to be left to prosecute and rule on cases free from political pressure, but fully in line with principles of professionalism and accountability.

As we have heard today, in the reporting period only limited progress was made on the objectives and conditions necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. We hope that progress on that track can accelerate. We welcome the ongoing work of the EU-led multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continues to play an important role in supporting the local authorities in maintaining a safe and secure environment. While the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is, as it should be, in the hands of its citizens, the international community, including the Council, has a responsibility to encourage and support it.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his briefing this morning.

It is crucial that we uphold the commitment to full compliance with the provisions of the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and ensure full compliance with all efforts aimed at promoting peace and stability for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that regard, Uruguay supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also support the need to respect the rule of law in all actions of political leaders in the country.

We note with concern that the forty-ninth report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina (S/2016/395, annex) indicates that little progress has been made in achieving the five objectives and two conditions still pending, as established by the Steering Board, that are required for the closure of the Office of the High Representative — known as the 5+2 agenda. In that connection, we urge that the process move forward under more favourable conditions in the coming months so that the 5+2 agenda can be fully implemented through compromise by all parties.

Uruguay rejects all terrorist attacks, such as took place in Rajlovac, on the outskirts of Sarajevo, on 18 November 2015, which cost the lives of two soldiers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are also concerned about continuing incidents that risk undermining inter-ethnic relations.

We also take note of positive developments. We welcome the fact that the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry for Foreign Trade and Economic Relations oversaw the full implementation of their obligations flowing from the Subregional Arms Control Agreement, in line with article IV, annex 1-B of the Dayton Peace Accord. We also welcome the fact that the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted

decisions on the destruction of certain munitions and explosive devices that have been stored in military facilities. We particularly highlight the ratification of the border demarcation agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, especially as this is the first such agreement to be ratified with a neighbouring country. We hope that during 2016 Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue along this course of positive developments, thus generating trust in stability.

Uruguay believes that the presence of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Operation Althea is a guarantee for the political and security stability of the country. It is essential that the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to cooperate fully with the Office of the High Representative until the end of his mandate, commensurate with the requirements of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Uruguay hopes to see a stable Bosnia and Herzegovina in which all communities can coexist peacefully and harmoniously.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My country welcomes your initiative, Mr. President, to organize this debate on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and would like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the outstanding quality of his report (S/2016/395, annex). My delegation would also like to assure him of its full support for the work that he and his Office are currently undertaking on the ground.

More than 20 years after the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues, despite a number of persistent difficulties, on its path towards reunification and the building of a solid nation.

My delegation would like to note some of the progress made by the country, in particular in terms of the implementation of the reforms approved by the authorities, which have started to bear fruit and give rise to new hope. I am referring, to mention just some of that progress, to Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for European Union membership, the efforts of the Bosnian authorities aimed at transferring to the State assets and property designated as defence property, as well as the adoption of labour legislation. Of course, those efforts need to be consolidated.

However, that progress should not lead us to forget the fragile nature of the situation in the country and the region. There are still causes for concern. I would like to refer to the difficulties that the authorities seem to face in certain areas, such as the publication of the 2013 census results, the European coordination mechanism, the implementation of the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court on Mostar, as well as the follow-up to the requests of the International Monetary Fund. Other causes for concern include the decision made to hold a referendum, which clearly jeopardizes the sovereignty and integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the calls made by a number of Republika Srpska officals for the secession of that entity.

Other developments that threaten the sovereignty and integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been observed, including the ongoing questioning of the authority of the judicial authorities of the State. The refusal by the principal authorities of Republika Srpska to implement the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court regarding the unconstitutionality of the provisions of the Republika Srpska law on holidays is one of several examples of that.

For all of those reasons, my delegation would like to reaffirm its commitment to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as guaranteed by the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country's Constitution and international law.

Turning now to another area, counter-terrorism is one of the acute challenges facing Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a context where complex migration flows and the return of foreign terrorist fighters are likely to generate additional risks for the security of the country. It goes without saying that tangible results will not be achieved in that fight without the necessary strengthening, at all levels, of cooperation between the authorities.

Senegal also welcomes the outstanding work carried out by the European Union Special Representative in the promotion and implementation of the reconstruction programme, as well as the socioeconomic programmes involving cooperation between the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. Along those same lines, my delegation welcomes the interest shown by the European Union in continuing its military operation through the multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the support of the Security Council, which authorized the extension of its mandate by 12 months.

Furthermore, as underscored in the report of the High Representative, the presence in the country of the European Union military mission with an executive mandate remains crucial. Nevertheless, we believe that the international community should continue to support the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to develop greater resilience in the face of socioeconomic challenges. What is at stake here is the strengthening of the security and defence forces of the country, one of the priorities of the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR). We encourage EUFOR to continue its support, which in the long term will enable the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to fill a number of strategic and operational gaps.

In conclusion, I would like to encourage the European Union to continue its reform programme for the restoration of peace, social cohesion and State authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I reaffirm the unreserved support of Senegal for the work accomplished by the High Representative.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to welcome Mr. Inzko, High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is with a great deal of attention that we have familiarized ourselves with Mr. Inzko's report to the Security Council (see S/2016/395, annex) and listened to his briefing today. However, we must be candid. The assessments that he made do not promote national reconciliation in that long-suffering country. That is quite unfortunate, as national reconciliation and the promotion of a mutually respectful relationship among the country's peoples are today gaining key importance given the challenges faced by Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Once again, we are forced to note that the High Representative's report is far from being objective and balanced in nature. It merely notes that there are problems in Bosnian society, without attempting to understand their essence or the objective reasons for which they have emerged. We hope that in the future the High Representative will — to a greater extent — focus on assessments of the implementation of his mandate and the activity of the structure that was entrusted to him during the reporting period, and that he will limit himself strictly to the issues having to do with Dayton.

Moreover, we expect the High Representative to bear in mind and be respectful of the views of all of the peoples of that State. That is why we consider inappropriate for him to present his views with regard to his support for the activities of a number of specialized bodies in Bosnia and Herzegovina dealing with the fulfilment of the criteria required for the country to launch the programme of action leading to NATO membership. In pushing the NATO topic, Mr. Inzko is acting counter to his basic task, which is to seek unifying factors for the country. In fact, he is siding with but a part of Bosnian society. As is well known, there are other views in the country — ones that are far from being in favour of NATO membership.

We also believe that the topic of reallocating defence property is one that should be considered exclusively as one of the conditions for winding down the mechanism of the High Representative. It should be considered in an unbiased way, as it is intrinsically linked to the broader issue of civilian versus State property. He should — not just in words, but in fact — promote inter-Bosnian dialogue. That, after all, is the last open point on the 5+2 agenda. He should take more seriously the political agreements that were reached back in 2012 among the leaders of the country's main parties.

That is also true of Euro-integration-related aspects. It would seem that, although a decision was made to split the two mandates in 2011, the High Representative continues to combine his position with that of the European Union Special Representative. A great many here today referred to the problem of Mostar. In that regard, it would seem that everyone has simply forgotten that it was interference by one of Mr. Inzko's predecessors that led to the impasse around the prospect of forming a multi-ethnic society in the city.

It is important that the report refer to the growing threat of Islamic extremism facing Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are convinced that that is one of the most serious problems and should, in the future, be featured as one of the key elements in the reports of the High Representative, whose task it is to fully promote the efforts of the competent bodies and organs in Bosnia and Herzegovina involved in combating terrorism, and to promote their cooperation with partner agencies in neighbouring countries and international agencies.

The problem of terrorism presents yet another strong argument in favour of a unifying agenda. It is necessary to focus on strengthening inter-agency coordination for counter-terrorism purposes. Instead of that, the High Representative continues to focus

on imaginary challenges to the Dayton Agreement, in an unjustified way, laying almost all responsibility for every problem in the stabilization process on the Bosnian Serbs. His discussion of the recent verdict of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia with regard to *Karadžić* and *Šešelj* reveals a similar approach. We believe that in that situation it would have been good for the High Representative to distance himself from his personal feelings, which would undoubtedly help the members of the Security Council to form an objective picture of the processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that respect, we urge our colleagues in the Council, as we have done before, to familiarize themselves carefully with the latest report of the leadership of Republika Srpska on their implementation of the Dayton Agreement, which includes a great deal of useful information and constructive considerations for making progress on a settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We would like to especially emphasize the undesirability of any interference by the High Representative in discussions on the sensitive topic of reforming the Constitutional Court in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Attempts by the High Representative to preserve the current situation, where the last word in that key body lies with foreign justices, are counterproductive. It is important that the Bosnian parties, without foreign interference and without pressure or threats, be able to reach agreement on new parameters for membership in the Constitutional Court, alongside the agreements already achieved on clarifying the modalities for the operation of the Court and the Prosecutor's Office, which would substantially contribute to overcoming the palpable crisis of confidence in the common Bosnian justice system.

Let us turn now to the positive. We believe that it is useful to acknowledge the joint steps taken by the leadership of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to forge intergovernmental cooperation, including the first joint session of the Government of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in November 2015, as well the visit by the Head of the Government of Serbia, Mr. Vučić, to the Investment Development Conference in Srebrenica. The parties are quite capable of coexisting if no one interferes, and they can promote national reconciliation.

Mindful of all those factors, we are in favour of a further reduction in the budget and personnel of the Office of the High Representative, based on the fact that the path towards transferring responsibility for the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Bosnians themselves is by now well justified and must continue to be appropriately reflected in the methods of action of the international presence. The time for protectorates is long gone. Under the current conditions, we consider the use by High Representative of his extraordinary authority under the "Bonn Powers" to be unacceptable. There can be no alternative to inter-Bosnian dialogue, free of external pressure. The creation of conditions for advancing such dialogue and for the search by the Bosnian parties of mutually acceptable options for reforms based on the Dayton principles is the priority task for the international community.

Consolidating Bosnia and Herzegovina and ensuring the functionality of its central structures will be successful only if they are the result of consensus among the three constituent peoples. That, I believe, is an axiom.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in that country. It was very encouraging to hear from him that the martial art of karate serves as a means of uniting the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

More than 20 years have passed since the brutal war in Bosnia and Herzegovina came to an end. The prosperity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is critical, not only for its future but also for the peace and stability of the Western Balkans region. Japan, as a member of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, has continuously supported the country's reconstruction and State-building efforts for two decades.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now at an important juncture. The country has made the transition from war to peace, but the question is whether the country can achieve lasting peace and a successful future. In that regard, Japan is seriously concerned about the decision of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska to hold a referendum on secession. Such a referendum would constitute a breach of the Dayton Agreement. It would also undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the President of Republika Srpska stated publicly that the referendum has been put aside, the National Assembly's decision has not been repealed. Furthermore, the President has continued to make public statements referring to

the Republika Srpska's independence. Japan urges all political leaders to refrain from any divisive rhetoric.

Japan warmly congratulates Bosnia and Herzegovina on its application to join the European Union, which it submitted in February. We hope that that will present an opportunity for the country to make further progress on the reforms needed for greater integration.

Before concluding, I would like to reassure the Security Council of Japan's strong support for High Representative Inzko and his Office. In the light of the importance of the role of the High Representative, Japan has been underwriting 10 per cent of the entire budget of his Office for 20 years. The visit of the High Representative to Japan in January was appreciated by the Japanese authorities. I wish Mr. Inzko every success so that outstanding objectives and conditions necessary for the closure of his Office can be achieved at an early date.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Egypt.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his comprehensive briefing to the Security Council on his recent report (S/2016/841, annex) on the implementation of the Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Egypt reiterates its full support for Mr. Inzko's efforts.

Twenty years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which brought to an end one of the most brutal conflicts in the world, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face a number of critical political challenges. Egypt would like to express its concern that efforts to deal with those challenges remain insufficiently backed by a comprehensive consensus among the different political stakeholders in the country. Egypt warns that the failure to address those challenges may undermine some of the achievements made at the political level since the signing of the Dayton Agreement.

In that respect, Egypt stresses that the Dayton Agreement will remain the cornerstone for efforts to bring peace to the region, which is the sole basis for stability in the country.

In that respect, Egypt stresses that the divisive rhetoric and calls by some stakeholders and political parties that have called for the secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina constitute serious threats to the political process as a whole. It may also have a spillover effect on the entire Balkan region.

We therefore call on all political leaders to put the common interests of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina above narrow ethnic and political interests, which undermine opportunities for progress and stability. In that regard, Egypt emphasizes the importance of all parties respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as all decisions taken by its judicial authorities and the mechanisms of international justice, and to prevent any negative impact on the political process in Bosnia and Herzegovina or its regional relations.

Moreover, we cannot separate internal developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the larger context of the Balkan region as a whole. We therefore stress the importance of building good-neighbourly relations, mutual trust, positive and constructive dialogue, and enhanced regional cooperation in order to establish peace and stability in all countries of the region.

The economic challenges facing Bosnia and Herzegovina require the international community to mobilize its efforts to promote the achievement of an economic leap forward that could contribute to creating a domestic environment conducive to stability. We stress once again the importance of regional cooperation in attaining such progress, and call on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to pursue their efforts to overcome the political obstacles to economic growth by enhancing the political participation of all citizens without discrimination, encompassing all national groups irrespective of their ethnic background. We affirm Egypt's full support for the efforts of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in fighting terrorism and its readiness to provide all forms of assistance in countering extremist ideologies, in particular violent, radical religious rhetoric, and in correcting religious misconceptions.

In conclusion, we reiterate the importance, now more than ever before, for all people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to strive to affirm the principles of social coexistance and political agreement and to move ahead on the path to peace. This enterprise must be undertaken in parallel with genuine regional and international support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Vukašinović (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May, and to wish you and your delegation every success. We welcome Mr. Valentin lnzko, High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agrement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we have taken note of his forty-ninth report (S/2016/395, annex), covering the period from 22 October 2015 to 15 April 2016.

During the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina continued its steady work on implementing its socioeconomic reforms. Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities at all levels have coordinated their efforts in ensuring that all concrete measures necessary to successful reforms are put in place. There is a common understanding that refining the legal and fiscal framework and creating an environment more attractive to investment is essential to economic growth and creating new jobs.

Bosnia and Herzegovina successfully chaired the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the largest and oldest European political organization, comprising 47 member States. During our chairmanship, we successfully accomplished all our priorities and coordinated the response of the Council of Europe to the refugee crisis at its peak. Furthermore, the chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina facilitated the process of opening for signature the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism, which focuses on the problem of the foreign fighters.

Following the significant progress made on the implementation of the reform agenda, Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted its application for membership to the European Union on 15 February. The submission of the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina was a concrete result of the new approach of the European Union towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. We thank the European Union and its member States for their strong support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's European perspective. On its part, Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to work to implement its reforms, improve the economy, and strengthen the rule of law and good governance.

The economic and fiscal situation of the country has been under influence of the global economic slowdown. However, in the first three quarters of 2015 industrial production increased by 2.5 per cent and the inflation rate stood at 0.8 per cent, which means that consumer prices fell slightly in comparison to the previous year.

The advancement of friendly and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region in areas of mutual interest is one of main priorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to pay special attention to strengthening cooperation with countries of the region. There is a common agreement among Western Balkan States that collaboration in the field of transportation and energy is the most important area for economic growth.

The International Economic Fair Mostar 2016, held from 12 to 16 April, , was a great opportunity to further bolster regional cooperation. During that event, members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina held a number of bilateral meetings with regional leaders and leaders of neighbouring States, including the President of Croatia, the President of Montenegro, the Prime Minster of Serbia, the President of Slovakia and the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey.

Bosnia and Herzegovina stands committed to fully cooperating with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, as well as to continue processing war crimes before domestic courts. We reiterate that fighting impunity at the local level is vital to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a complex and multinational State. In that regard, implementing the national strategy for processing war crimes, regardless of the national or religious origins of perpetrators or victims, is essential to reconciliation and long-term stability.

Terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism constitute one of the main security challenges at the global, regional and national levels. Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with the provisions of its amended penal code, continues to process individuals involved in fighting on behalf of terrorist and paramilitary organizations, as well as those facilitating the recruitment of terrorist fighters.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's judicial and security institutions continue to implement our strategy for preventing and combating terrorism. The strategy, alongside security measures, includes preventive activities for deradicalization undertaken by national stakeholders, including religious communities,

educational institutions, civil society organizations and media. We would also like to underline that during the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina made significant progress in combating organized crime, corruption and money-laundering. Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the European Union, has introduced a regional initiative on the prevention of terrorism and the illicit arms trade. The main goal of the initiative is to establish a database of individuals who constitute a security threat, as well as a regional network for the prevention of arms smuggling from the countries of the Western Balkans.

It is evident that flows of refugees and migrants through the Balkans will continue to pose significant challenges to the States of the region and their instituions. Thus far, Bosnia and Herzegovina has not been under pressure from the significant movement of migrants through its territory. Nevertheless, Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions have undertaken a set of comprehensive measures, including in the humanitarian and security fields, in the event of a massive influx of refugees. We believe that only extensive and coordinated actions at the global level to address the underlying causes of migration in countries of origin can serve to bring about a satisfactory solution to the migrant crisis.

Lastly, I wish to express the unwavering commitment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities to continue to work steadily towards building a better future for its citizens. I would also like to thank our international partners for their continued support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that has travelled a long way from being a security consumer to becoming a police and military contributor to United Nation peacekeeping missions worldwide.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vrailas: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

I join other speakers in welcoming High Representative Valentin Inzko back to the Security Council and in assuring him of the European Union's continued support. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina and thank him for his statement.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been subject to discussion in the Council for more than two decades. Over that period, we have witnessed an important transformation in the nature of these discussions, reflecting the strengthened stability and progress in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and socio-economic development in the country. The Council has contributed greatly to the advancements seen since the end of the armed conflict in 1995.

Today Bosnia and Herzegovina is actively contributing to United Nations missions, gradually transforming from the role of the security consumer to that of security provider. The country held a seat among the Council's members and took its share of responsibility for global peace and security. At the same time, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Residual Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, supported by the local judicial authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries of the region, are continuing to try to bring the perpetrators of war crimes to justice, and peace to their victims

The European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a central driver in overcoming challenges on the ground and in mobilizing citizens and their elected representatives behind the necessary political and socioeconomic reforms. A great majority of the country's citizens strongly desire that Bosnia and Herzegovina advance in its European aspirations. On 15 February, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted the country's application for membership of the European Union. The European Union welcomed that as a broad and unequivocal expression of the country's commitment to continue its efforts along the EU path. The application follows a further deepening of the political dialogue with the European Union in 2015. That reaffirms the true and lasting commitment and engagement of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Together with our international partners, including the international financial institutions, the European Union continues to invest in Bosnia and Herzegovina's reforms. Those joint efforts support domestic stability and lay the foundation for future prosperity for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been a long-shared goal of the European Union and that of the Council.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities, with the support of the European Union and its international partners, have developed, agreed and are implementing the most comprehensive package of socioeconomic reforms that the country has seen in its recent history. Those efforts require a serious commitment and a readiness to make difficult political decisions in overcoming the long legacy of underinvestment, lack of structural reforms and burdensome administrative difficulties. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to re-energize its economy and make it more competitive. Meaningful progress in that regard is needed and will enable the Council of the European Union to decide on the next steps along Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU path.

The overall positive momentum on the ground, however, continues to face important challenges flowing from the persisting political divisions and inefficient administrative and decision-making structures. In anticipation of the municipal elections to be held in October, we call for avoiding divisive agendas and rhetoric, as that might weaken the positive momentum and introduce inefficiency in decision-making at a time when the country needs to mobilize all its resources behind reforms.

Particular concerns have been raised by the intentions of the leadership of Republika Srpska to hold various referendums. Such political initiatives distract attention from the mounting socioeconomic difficulties, blurring the responsibility of the local authorities, and have strong potential to undermine the stability. Citizens will see through those actions, and their elected representatives, whom they entrusted to address those issues, will be held accountable. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all parties involved to reach an agreement as soon as possible on how to implement the electoral requirements to allow for elections in Mostar in October.

Reconciliation needs to advance broadly among the citizens and the political leadership representing their interests. To succeed, the country needs to move forward united. The European Union reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and united country, as well as to Bosnia and Herzegovina's European Union prospect.

The European Union will continue to use all available instruments to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and progress. The overall security situation has remained relatively calm and stable, yet stability has not been fully entrenched. In that regard, the European Union confirms its decision to maintain its presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including through the executive mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Operation Althea, while focusing on capacity-building and training.

As the country's stability continues to strengthen and further progress is achieved in reforms and on the EU path, the European Union will be looking forward to continuing the discussion with the international community on the reconfiguration of the international presence. We will do so in the appropriate forum. In that regard, the European Union calls on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet the outstanding objectives and the conditions for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made notable progress since the last discussion in the Council (see S/P.7555). Its European perspective drives the reforms in the country and contributes to overall stability and development. Political divisions remain, including across ethnic lines, and require continued focus and efforts by the international community, using appropriate tools. The European Union looks forward to the continued support of the Council in its role in guiding and assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina towards peace, stability and prosperity for all its citizens.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Let me start by joining other speakers in welcoming High Representative Valentin Inzko. I would also like to express our appreciation for his briefing and for his comprehensive report (S/2016/395, annex), as well as for his hard work and dedication in carrying out his important mandate.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union (EU). I would like to make several remarks in my national capacity.

Croatia regularly participates in the Security Council's semi-annual debates on Bosnia and Herzegovina. We do so not only for the obvious and self-explanatory reasons — that we are a neighbouring country and a friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Equally important reasons for our engagement include the fact that Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina are one

of the three constituent peoples and that Croatia, as a signatory to the Dayton Peace Agreement, has a special responsibility towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. For all those reasons, the importance Croatia attaches to the territorial integrity, stability and functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina is of the highest degree.

We have stated on many occasions, and we shall repeat it today: Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important European country that deserves a secure and prosperous future, and, Croatia, being the only member State that directly borders Bosnia and Herzegovina, stands ready to render it our full support and assistance.

The new Croatian Government is fully committed to continuing to provide Croatia's strong support to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first country that the new Croatian Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Mr Miro Kovač, visited after coming into office in January. Also, a joint session of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina is planned to take place in the near future in order to further strengthen our cooperation and relations.

As we discuss today developments in the reporting period, I wish to address three points that are of particular importance to us: European integration; the territorial integrity, stability and functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and united country; and accountability and reconciliation.

On the first point, Croatia has been a strong supporter of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, we welcome fully and strongly support Bosnia and Herzegovina's submission of its EU membership application in February. There is no doubt that the European integration process is creating an atmosphere conducive to the internal consolidation and modernization of the country.

The new EU approach has so far proven effective and is yielding results. It has helped inject new energy into the country's reform process and EU path. The focus on the reform agenda, in particular positive efforts to advance economic and social reforms, has enabled the country to emerge from its deep stagnation. Croatia will continue to advocate for a strong and permanent focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina at the EU level and beyond. Bosnia and Herzegovina is at an important crossroads now and its political leadership should spare no effort to seize this positive momentum to move forward and implement much-needed reforms aimed at improving the socioeconomic situation and ensuring the overall prosperity of all its citizens.

Secondly, the territorial integrity, stability and functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and unified country are of paramount importance to Croatia. This is also a fundamental prerequisite for the stability and prosperity of all of South-East Europe and the entire European continent. The specific and complex political system rooted in the Dayton Peace Agreement is in many aspects based on ethnic representation, which should rest on genuine equality among the three constituent peoples. This equality is the key element for achieving the stability and functionality of the country. We are therefore deeply concerned about continued secessionist rhetoric, ideas and actions coming from Republika Srpska. This is unacceptable and highly disruptive for the reform agenda and the overall stability and progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country's future must not be held hostage by a single entity.

We note that decision of the members of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska to call a referendum on the authority of the High Representative, the Court and the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina was not acted upon, but we regret that this decision of June 2015 has not yet been repealed. We are afraid that the Republika Srpska's political leadership may once again pursue divisive agendas in the context of the October municipal elections. This highly controversial decision has had a detrimental effect to the sovereignty and integrity of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It violates the Dayton Peace Agreement and has a strong potential to undermine the stability of the country and the wider region. We must not be silent about it; on the contrary, such conduct should be condemned in clear and definite terms.

Thirdly, with regard to accountability and reconciliation, in late March the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia delivered the long-awaited verdict in the case against Radovan Karadžić. The Tribunal found him guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war committed by the Serb forces during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The verdict came 20 years after the war, during which unspeakable atrocities, such as the genocide in Srebrenica, were committed. Although Karadžić was sentenced to 40 years of imprisonment, for the victims and their families it will take much more than this verdict to heal the

wounds. Much more will be needed to achieve genuine reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond. For that, not only the criminal has to be put behind the bars, but also his genocidal and criminal policy.

We sincerely hope that more than 20 years after the war and its horrors, Bosnia and Herzegovina is firmly on the path towards a better, more prosperous, secure and stable future. We firmly believe that this future for Bosnia and Herzegovina lies within the community of the European Union and NATO States. We are looking towards the days when the biggest stories coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be about war crimes and suffering, or about irresponsible politicians threatening the very existence of the country they are supposed to serve, but stories like the one I would like to conclude my statement with — a story about a bike trail.

Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have launched a joint project, funded by the EU, on the revitalization of an old railway route — a 200-kilometre railway track linking Dubrovnik, on the Croatian coastline, with the mountainous hinterland of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This historic route, which navigates through a very beautiful landscape, will be turned into a long-distance cycling track, thereby earning tourist income for the local populations on both sides of the border. This is where our joint future lies — in things and endeavours that connect us, together with our joint European destiny.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Serbia.

Mr. Milanović (Serbia): First of all, allow me to wish Egypt a very successful presidency and to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting. I willl High Representative Inzko back to the United Nations. Since I am speaking last, I thank all previous speakers for their statements.

The Republic of Serbia is firmly committed to promoting comprehensive bilateral relations with its neighbours and invests continuous efforts in creating conditions for a new kind and quality of relations in the Western Balkans and South-East Europe. As a next-door neighbour, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the key partner of my country in the pursuit of this important goal. The possibilities, as well as the need and interests, are there; what we need to do, however, is to mobilize additional resources and renew our energies to bring about a better future for all our peoples. The Government of Serbia and Prime Minister Vučić in particular, have launched a number of initiatives recently, making important breakthroughs in cooperation with partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina and bringing us ever closer to the common goal of each and every responsible government in the region — reconciliation, mutual trust, faster economic development and European Union (EU) integration.

More than 20 years have elapsed since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which put an end to the killing and devastation wrought by a tragic conflict and brought peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Agreement, which is in its third decade of implementation, was an important stepping stone in the process of reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire region. It provided a basis for restoring trust among its constituent peoples and entities, which is crucially important for the country's future at this point in time as well. And although it is always possible to do more, significant results have been achieved in the consolidation of society, economic development and the cooperation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its neighbours and in its integration efforts, which, not unlike elsewhere in the region, are expected to have a catalytic effect on its road to full EU membership.

As a guarantor of the Dayton Agreement, Serbia has made every effort to be the best possible neighbour to Bosnia and Herzegovina; after all, relations between the two countries have a ripple effect on the entire region. Abiding strictly by the provisions of the Dayton Agreement, my country is firmly committed to preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for it is only in conditions of full stability that Bosnia and Herzegovina can be a neighbour whose pace of development will continue to rise and constituent peoples will enjoy a better quality of life tomorrow than they do today. We believe that, as the homeland of many Serbs as well, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands at the cusp of a better future, that its regional integration will tighten and that its infrastructure, its economy and effective administration will continue to develop as it progresses along the road to European integration.

Dialogue and agreements among the two entities and the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina stand out as the most important values and achievements of more than two decades of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Aimed at reaching consensus, they are the only proper and effective instruments for addressing the issues relevant for the present and future

of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Always at a premium, dialogues are particularly important in times of reform when we seek to fulfil the criteria and reach the standards in the process of European integrations, as they help us bridge the differences that sometimes shape our vies and positions. Proceeding from its own experience and the experiences of others, my country is convinced that Bosnia and Herzegovina and its political actors have the will and energy to achieve, through mutual agreements, solutions that will benefit and be acceptable to all. Such agreements and their implementation will help improve the understanding and trust among the Serbs, Bosniacs and Croats and energize and provide additional impetus to the European integration and reform processes.

We have been witness to a number of divergent views and opinions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past period. Serbia considers them to be internal issues, best addressed by agreements among its political actors within the existing legal system of the country, in an atmosphere of constructiveness and mutual respect.

My country has initiated a number of political dialogues at the highest level, aimed at promoting the development of a wide range of bilateral relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. A joint session was held between the Government and Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo last November. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić took part in the Business Investment Forum at Srebrenica on 11 November 2015, and the Government of Serbia allocated sizeable financial resources, in the overall amount of €5 million, to help carry out the projects important for the town of Srebrenica and the surrounding area. In view of the tragic events that took place at Srebrenica and the suffering of that and many other towns and villages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, my country believes that partnership aimed at reaching reconciliation and creating a better future is the best platform for the promotion of good-neighbourly relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 12 April, Prime Minister Vučić visited Mostar for the opening of the Mostar Economic Fair, where he met all the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Republic of Serbia is ready to continue to work not only on maintaining but also on promoting the achievements made in cooperation with the central Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which it considers an important link in the quest to bring about a stable and prosperous Western Balkans and South-East Europe. Proceeding from the provisions of the Dayton Agreement, Serbia is also committed to furthering transparent relations with the Republic of Srpska and to cooperating and expanding cooperatibn with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Recently, Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted an official request for admission to the European Union. Serbia welcomes that step and expresses its readiness to share its experience from the negotiation process. Bilateral European Union integration consultations with Bosnia and Herzegovina were held at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia last February. On that occasion, the interlocutors from Bosnia and Herzegovina were handed a copy of Serbia's replies to the questionnaire of the European Commission, which we hope will help Bosnia and Herzegovina in its next step on its own road to Europe. Although the two sides may be at different stages of the process, they actively support one another and exchange views and experiences, for which the memorandum of understanding provides a convenient framework.

It is in my country's ongoing interest to promote economic cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that context, we are pleased to note that the level of the cooperation and the scope of trade are increasing year in, year out. In 2015, trade exchange amounted to €1.441 billion and, with about €900 million in investments, Serbia is one of the largest investors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including in the areas of infrastructure, energy and joint ventures.

Serbia is firmly committed to promoting reconciliation and working towards a better future for all peoples of the region. Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, my country's first neighbour, its stability and prosperity are of paramount importance. We are ready to intensify our contacts and cooperation and to invest additional efforts in pursuit of peace, security and a better future, to which all peoples of the region are entitled and which they well deserve.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.