



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9319th meeting

Wednesday, 10 May 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President (*spoke in French*): 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. I request the Protocol Officer to escort Her Excellency Ms. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to her seat at the Council table.

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

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to put on record our disagreement with the presence of Mr. Christian Schmidt at this meeting in his capacity as so-called High Representative. The Security Council did not approve him for that position. We want to stress that the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina is on the Council's agenda under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. For a quarter of a century now, it has been our practice to approve High Representatives. Without a corresponding mandate from the Council, the position of High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina therefore remains vacant. In view of that, we would like to emphasize that Mr. Schmidt has no right to speak on behalf of the international community or to submit any documents to the Security Council.

Nevertheless, it is also the practice of the Security Council to hear speakers in their personal capacity. That is how we will perceive Mr. Schmidt's presence in the Chamber today.

The President (*spoke in French*): I take note of the remarks of the representative of the Russian Federation. It is decided to invite High Representative Schmidt to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency

Mr. Olof Skoog, Head 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 give the floor to Mr. Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: It is an honour to address the Security Council here today. Almost three decades have passed since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. I see encouraging developments in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, but I also see profound threats to the fundamentals of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am therefore pleased to have an opportunity to report to the Security Council on the situation.

Historically, geographically and culturally, the country is on an irreversible path towards European integration. The functionality of the authorities at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina is of utmost importance both for fully implementing the Dayton Agreement and for advancing on the path towards the European Union (EU). The EU candidacy status granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 15 December last year is a crucial step on that path. It created positive momentum and was welcomed by the population. Positive momentum was also created by the rapid formation of the executive and legislative authorities at almost all levels in the country following the general elections of 2 October. The appointment of the executive authorities of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska was swift. Both Governments are in place and operational.

However, the entity of the Federation was caught in a stalemate between political blocs for seven months, threatening the Government with destabilization and institutional dysfunctionality, which I had largely addressed through my decisions of last October and April. On 27 April, when all the constitutional deadlines had expired, I enabled the House of Representatives of the Federation to vote on a Government suggested by a majority of the members of Parliament and formally proposed by Federation President Lidija Bradara. The next day, 28 April, the Federation House of Representatives voted in favour of that Government proposal. The end result is a stable and fully functional Federation. Furthermore, I am glad to inform the Council that the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court concluded in March 2023 that my October decisions were in full accordance with the

Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution and the relevant international human rights conventions. Despite that, the adoption of anti-discriminatory legislation remains one of the most important tasks before the Government so that the *Sejdić and Finci* group of cases and others can be implemented in the near future.

One of the key challenges to the full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement comes from the other entity, Republika Srpska, and the developments there are not business as usual. The secessionist positioning and rhetoric of the entity's leadership have dramatically increased in the reporting period. Republika Srpska's President, Milorad Dodik, openly advocates for the independence of Republika Srpska and has even spoken publicly about joining Serbia. That calls into question the fundamentals of the Dayton Peace Agreement and pursues a secessionist policy.

I am particularly worried about a joint statement signed by the ruling parties of Republika Srpska on 24 April. The statement appears to be an action plan for secession. It mentions that the two entities own State property exclusively and conduct legislation that is not at State level, and it rejects the authority of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The signatories oblige Republika Srpska representatives in the country's institutions to suspend decision-making at the State level until the Republika Srpska Government and Parliament approve their decisions. The statement calls for the Serb judges to withdraw from the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court. It also calls for establishing a police unit to conduct so-called border monitoring between the entities. None of those measures can be reconciled with the Dayton Agreement. They clearly endanger the State institutions and the country's unity.

On 6 March, in a letter to Radovan Višković, the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, President Dodik promoted an erroneous and misleading interpretation of the Dayton Agreement and the constitutional framework. He disregards the explicit provisions of the Constitution that uphold the principle of continuity between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and today's Bosnia and Herzegovina — a principle that has been reaffirmed on many occasions by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Within Republika Srpska, new legislation and initiatives promoted by the ruling coalition are shrinking the space for civil society and independent media. Bosnia and Herzegovina must not become a country divided between authoritarianism

in one entity and democracy in the other. Furthermore, the question of State property still needs to be resolved in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it should be done by consensus. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only post-Yugoslav State that has not yet succeeded in settling the questions from its Yugoslav heritage.

It seems that there is an intention to gain domestic support by misinterpreting legal and political facts and by claiming that resolving the issue of State and defence property would challenge the very existence of Republika Srpska. The entity authorities continue to disregard the final and binding decisions of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court by attempting to regulate the matter, in violation of those decisions. That was the case with the law on immovable property adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly, a law that I suspended on 27 February. The Constitutional Court has since annulled that legislation. If the State, entities, cantons and municipalities can find a solution to the issue of State property, everybody will benefit, and nobody will lose.

On 22 March, in a joint statement by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, the ambassadors expressed deep concern about the recent developments in Republika Srpska. I think that in that regard international partners must continue to respond with a united position. The State Constitution guarantees the existence of both entities and Brčko but prohibits an entity from seceding or unifying with another State. Any step in that direction would have perilous implications, putting the 28 years of peace and progress at direct risk. We cannot step aside and allow divisive political tactics to endanger the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the cohesion of its society. I welcome the reassurances by the neighbouring States of Serbia and Croatia that they fully respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am also grateful for the continued presence of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR-Althea). As a Dayton institution, it is the military counterpart to the Office of the High Representative and a confidence-building measure and necessary tool for safeguarding peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. EUFOR-Althea's role remains critical.

Little progress has been made in implementing the 5+2 agenda, apart from budget adoptions at various levels, which contribute to fiscal sustainability, as well as some positive developments in the Brčko district.

Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces considerable challenges regarding State and defence property, the rule of law and various aspects of fiscal sustainability. There is an attempt to follow the European Union's proposals to implement European standards, but it is progressing very, very slowly. We expect — and this is a political observation — that with the Government now enforcing it at full capacity it can hopefully speed up a bit. The Office of the High Representative remains committed to working with the authorities to achieve those goals. As for the economy, growth continues despite challenges such as increased inflationary pressure. In previous years, uncertain and inadequate financing affected Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions' ability to carry out their legal obligations. In that regard, the adoption of an increased budget is a very positive development.

Trust-building is an indispensable element of the efforts to ensure sustainable peace and progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A recent analysis by the website Balkan Insight shows that the war in Ukraine and the pandemic have aggravated the situation of traumatized people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the study, a war veteran stated that the war in Ukraine triggers flashbacks, saying "I have stopped watching news from Ukraine — I cannot." Traumas remain widespread and often unaddressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina owing to a lack of institutional resources. I call on the members of the international community to support the national efforts to heal the widespread traumas in Bosnia and Herzegovina's society. I also call for funding — public, private or other — to assist the people who have suffered and are suffering the most. In that context I want to point to the contributions that are already being provided by United Nations agencies to specifically support such people, and we should continue on that path.

The denial of the Srebrenica genocide and the glorification of war criminals continue to be a problem. Remembrance, memorialization and truth-telling for future generations are preconditions for peaceful coexistence among the various groups in the country. Without that, this country cannot transition from a post-war society to a modern, unified, democratic nation. With that understanding, I amended the law on the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial Centre on 20 February, so that the Centre can broaden and intensify its engagement. I am glad that the city of Mostar recently changed the names of streets that had been named after

leading members of the Ustasha, a regime in the Second World War. I want to add that on the regional level, I have been seeing a lot of commitments by mayors, municipalities and non-governmental organizations to dealing with the issue, but a great deal remains to be done.

When it comes to the prosecution of war crimes, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the most advanced country in the region. But even now, after the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has done its work, the prosecution of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity needs the full support of the international community, because there are thousands of cases to be processed. War criminals convicted by an international court must be entered into the national criminal records. I welcome the efforts to create a legal basis for this, and I am very ready to support them. I am working closely with the Registrar of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. Those who were convicted and served their sentence in prison should remain silent in public, save to speak about redress in a manner respectful of the victims.

School curriculums that differ along ethnic lines cannot overcome the shadows of the past. The diversity of the constituent people must be respected, but there must also be space for citizens who do not belong to such ethnic groups.

Disunity in foreign and defence policy is another shortcoming in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It would be beneficial for the country if the three members of the presidency agreed more often on common foreign policy positions, in the interests of the country and all its citizens.

In the face of continued instability, people — especially young people — are leaving the country in record numbers. Political participation among youth is low. When asked about the reasons for migration, many people refer to widespread corruption, nepotism, segregated education, divided society and the limited job market.

The overall participation of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in executive and legislative positions remains low. Yet there were some appointments of women to high-level political positions after the October 2022 elections. I am speaking here of Her Excellency Ms. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Her Excellency

Ms. Borjana Krišto, Chair of the Council of Ministers, and Ms. Lidija Bradara, President of the Federation. Women comprise around 20 per cent of the State- and entity-level parliaments. The balance in the executive authorities is even worse, especially at the local level.

Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex problem encompassing many issues and groups. Ethnic minorities and persons who do not belong to any constituent people, referred to as “Others” — in the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina — are banned from certain public offices, which are reserved for constituent peoples. I therefore call upon political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to launch comprehensive constitutional and legal reforms in order to tackle this problem and to implement the relevant decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. By introducing new legislation and constitutional amendments against discrimination we can address the shortfalls of Annex 4 of the Dayton Agreement, which is the State Constitution.

Minorities often face ethnic and religious discrimination. That is especially the case with the returnees. Social exclusion and discrimination against the Roma remain widespread, particularly in housing, employment, education and access to health services. More efforts are needed to combat discrimination and promote tolerance in the interest of fostering stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All those who suffered as a consequence of the war want to be reassured that peace will be protected. Political and religious leaders have a particular sensitivity for that need. Here I want to highlight the contribution of the Honourable Reis-ul-Ulema, head of the Islamic Community. His statements often express the fears of those relying on him. In those cases, we have to listen. We see that there is a lot of uncertainty and that the people feel unsafe. The Honourable Reis-ul-Ulema, head of the Islamic Community, has been personally attacked and humiliated in wartime and is now very engaged in interreligious dialogue and reconciliation. I appreciate that, and underscore the need for interreligious dialogue, which we should support.

As the international community, we have to renew the promise we made to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 — never again. Those who put peace at stake deserve a clear answer. If we say never again, we must act in line with our promise.

In conclusion, I will underscore one message only: Bosnia and Herzegovina’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are not negotiable. Borders within the country do not and will not exist. Respect for the country’s constitutional, legal and institutional framework is the cornerstone of long-lasting peace, stability and progress. Without that, Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot move forward towards the European Union, to the detriment of all of its citizens. That needed move towards the EU and the adoption European standards could involve the Dayton Agreement, step by step, if and when necessary.

I value dialogue and openness with the political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina and regional interlocutors. I am hopeful for the country’s future within the European family. A lot of young people are leaving, but some are staying. Those who are staying do not agree with the current situation. They are invited to work for a better future and greater involvement. That could bring great momentum to the country.

My report shows some problematic developments, but is also very hopeful.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Schmidt for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank High Representative Christian Schmidt for his briefing and clarifications. I welcome to this meeting the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the delegations of Serbia and Croatia.

The formation of the new Government is a welcome development that ensures respect for the will of the majority, as expressed in the democratic elections. We also hail the constitutional amendment by the Office of the High Representative on the support of the presidency for a new Government. Preserving the stability achieved over the years requires measures to avoid new impasses in future.

On the other hand, we are concerned about recourse to the so-called Bonn powers, as, in our view, it feeds narratives about the alleged imposition of solutions from the outside. In order to prevent the erosion of public trust in the political system in place, we encourage local forces to act with restraint and to keep in mind the importance of putting the safety and well-being of the population above short-term political interests. In that sense, we welcome the ultimately peaceful transition to the new Federation Government, on 28 April.

Brazil views with even greater concern the separatist rhetoric adopted by some local leaders, particularly in the light of reports of the recurrence of ethnically based hate speech. In this and other files, our position has been clear and consistent — Brazil respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and condemns attempts to relativize that fundamental principle of the Charter of the United Nations. We urge local leaders to express their firm rejection of secessionist attempts, which brought so much suffering to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the not-so-distant past.

At the national level, we take note of the High Representative's concern over disagreements between members of the presidency. We trust the ability of Bosnian leaders to prevent the existence of opposing points of view — to be expected in a democratic political environment — from undermining efforts to strengthen the rule of law and regional integration.

Brazil supports the undertaking of trust-building measures between communities in order to prevent further episodes of ethnically based violence and create conditions conducive to the safe return of refugees. We condemn violations of minority rights in both entities, as well as any glorification of violence or denial of crimes committed during the war. We are aware of the frustrations regarding the implementation of the Dayton Accords. We believe, however, that the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina still offers the best prospects for preserving peace and stability.

Brazil reiterates its support for the full implementation of the 5+2 agenda, allowing Bosnia and Herzegovina to finally complete its transition from international oversight.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank the High Representative for his briefing. Malta values the role and mandate of the High Representative and acknowledges the importance of his Office in maintaining the continued stability and peace in the country. We take the High Representative's concerns about divisive inter-ethnic and secessionist rhetoric seriously as threats to peace and stability in the country and potentially to the wider region. The Office's presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is key to facilitating dialogue and maintaining calm in the region. We reiterate our position on the importance of sustained stability in the Western Balkans and the overall prosperity of the region.

We have taken note of the fact that authorities are now in place at the State and entity level. We hope that this step forward will foster increased cooperation between all parties for the sake of stability and social and economic prosperity. Malta calls for ensuring the representation of women in all Government institutions and highlights the importance of an inclusive public administration. We welcome the European Union (EU) candidate status granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of last year and support its commitment to achieving its goal of EU membership. We encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to strive to adopt the necessary reforms, particularly in addressing the 14 key priorities and strengthening the country's constitutional, electoral and judicial frameworks, which will ensure meaningful progress towards EU membership. We call for the reforms to be inclusive and based on the rule of law.

Malta condemns all nationalistic and divisive rhetoric and actions that could lead to unnecessary tensions or conflict, undermining stability and the quality of life in the country. That is especially true for dangerous discourse about secession that not only undermines the progress achieved but creates obstacles on the path towards EU accession. Malta is also concerned about the legislative initiatives and announcements in the Republika Srpska entity against LGBTQI persons and civil society and media freedom. We call for the implementation of credible and genuine measures to address shortcomings in the protection of the fundamental rights of persons belonging to minorities, including LGBTQI persons, and in preventing discrimination against them. We call for a strong, unified country that enacts coherent legislation through coordinated institutions. That is the only way to achieve adequate reforms and overcome future challenges. We stress the need for a strong commitment from all parties towards reconciliation and the strengthening of cohesion. We consider that to include a school curriculum that represents diversity but does not discriminate based on ethnicity, in order to ensure that children grow up in a reconciliatory environment.

Malta also recognizes the importance of the role of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in maintaining security and stability and believes that its presence is crucial to preserving the present stable situation.

In conclusion, we urge responsible and sensible leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina that strives for cooperation based on respect for all members of society

with a clear view towards EU integration and rejects decisions that perpetuate division. We support all efforts to engage in constructive, inclusive dialogue that guarantees the peaceful coexistence of all communities.

Ms. Oppong-Ntiri (Ghana): I thank Mr. Christian Schmidt, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his informative briefing. I also welcome the participation of the Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in this meeting.

The report of the High Representative highlights developments such as the rapid formation of State institutions at all levels following the general elections held last October. The effective functioning of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of Government is the bedrock of democratic, peaceful and stable societies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is critical to remedying the political deadlock, which in recent times has prevented the State from delivering on the social contract with its citizenry. We encourage further progress towards the formation of a new Federation Government.

We note the progressive commitments to ensuring fiscal sustainability through the adoption of the 2023 budget, as well as the Global Framework of Fiscal Balance and Policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023–2025, which is designed to increase funding to State institutions by significant margins and support their effectiveness. We are also encouraged by progressive developments in areas such as transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, infrastructure development, public administration and fiscal and economic reforms, all of which are taking place in Brčko district. As we have said before, those dividends of political will and cooperation should serve as a beacon for the full implementation of the 5+2 agenda across the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, a number of complex challenges remain in the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, we are concerned about the divisive rhetoric and actions marking the period under review. Escalatory language and hate speech diminish the prospects for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among the many ethnic societies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and must be avoided as much as possible. We urge all parties to remain faithful to their commitments under the General Framework Agreement and underscore that

all legitimate nationalist aspirations should be realized through dialogue in good faith and in a manner that does not destabilize the country's fragile peace.

We also note the continuing divergences in the Presidency on matters relating to the constitutional order, as well as internal and foreign policy issues. We reiterate our call on the leaders to work collaboratively to advance areas of commonality and find pragmatic approaches to outstanding concerns. In our view, little progress can be made on the many contested issues unless and until all leaders commit to a constructive dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and consensus-building in the interests of their constituents.

It would not be far from the truth to observe that Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently more divided and less stable than it has ever been since the end of the horrifying war. Rising tensions threaten to tear apart this multi-ethnic nation and reignite a political crisis, which its people and, indeed, the rest of the world can ill afford at a time of heightened global political tensions. We therefore urge for the continuing support of the Security Council and the international community in the implementation of the Peace Agreement and its objectives of peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Pending the completion of the 5+2 agenda, we encourage all sides to respect and work collaboratively with the Office of the High Representative. We also urge the High Representative to exercise his responsibilities with due regard to the enabling laws, and we emphasize the importance of respect for all national institutions. Having been granted EU candidate status in December of last year, Bosnia and Herzegovina and its leaders have a good opportunity to advance State reforms that can foster the country's EU-integration perspective.

In conclusion, I reaffirm Ghana's commitment to the preservation of the sovereignty and integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations and in the spirit of the General Framework Agreement for Peace.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Christian Schmidt for his briefing. I welcome the participation in this meeting of Her Excellency Ms. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as that of the representatives of Serbia and Croatia and the Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Since our previous meeting, in November (see S/PV.9179), the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been marked by several significant developments that should be highlighted. The holding of elections on 2 October, followed by the formation of the Council of Ministers and an executive, as well as the adoption of the budget within the legal time frame, is a remarkable development that attests to the efforts made by Bosnia and Herzegovina to exercise its full sovereign authority. We welcomed the significant participation in the 2022 general elections of women, who made up 42 per cent of the 7,258 registered candidates. We also note the greater involvement of young people in the political life of the country, something that should be encouraged to ensure harmonious State-building, provide future prospects for the young and slow down the trend among them of leaving the country, which has led to an outflow of more than half a million young people over the past 10 years and is a significant development challenge for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We stress the importance of strengthening the implementation of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, which is undoubtedly one of the best guarantees that Bosnia-Herzegovina can build a political future that corresponds to its history and sociological reality, and which takes into account the aspirations of the two entities and the three constituent peoples. My country encourages Bosnia's political leaders to work together to achieve that goal, including by instituting the necessary reforms, especially strengthening the rule of law. It is essential for the Federation to finally form a Government, because given the fact that elections were held in 2018 and 2022, it is hardly conceivable that the winners of the 2014 elections should remain in interim positions. We hope that the agreement reached by the parties representing each of the three constituent peoples to form a coalition will enable them to overcome that challenge and that they will work to find a compromise on the contentious issues. We welcome the clear commitment of the members of the new Presidency to accelerating the implementation of the 14 key priorities for integration into the European Union.

Building a more inclusive and egalitarian society requires the adoption of measures that promote coexistence, while respecting individual rights and freedoms and human rights, including freedom of religion. We urge all the parties to show restraint and to refrain from any hate speech or divisive rhetoric that could undermine the building of a lasting peace.

We encourage the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue their efforts to unblock the stalled economic development projects and agree on a position on the role of the international community. That political progress will contribute to improving the economic situation. We encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to address the legacies of the war by taking the necessary action with regard to its victims, returnees, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and missing persons.

In conclusion, my country reiterates its support for the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is an essential part of the peace and security architecture aimed at helping the country to overcome its security challenges. We support national initiatives that promote interaction between the entities and the Federation and that will enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to remain in control of its destiny.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I appreciate the detailed briefing on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of this debate and acknowledge the presence here today of the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union, Croatia and Serbia.

Ecuador stresses the importance of the Office of the High Representative in monitoring the implementation of the civilian aspects of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as its work in ensuring security and stability in the country. We urge all the parties to cooperate with the Office of the High Representative and to intensify their efforts to fulfil and implement the commitments, conditions and objectives set out in 2008 in the 5+2 agenda. The closure of the Office would be beneficial only after those conditions have been met and the objectives achieved.

We commend the peaceful holding of general elections in October of last year and the speedy formation of the new authorities, as well as the decision to unblock the formation of the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We urge for expanding the efforts to advance the full, equal and safe participation of women in political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We call on all the parties to put an end to the methods used to limit women's access and to all types of gender-based violence, including harassment.

Ecuador is concerned about the intensifying secessionist rhetoric from various actors in the country,

a development that could threaten the Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which in turn could put regional stability at risk. We urge all the parties to exercise calm and restraint and to refrain from any unilateral actions that could undermine the constitutional order established under the Dayton Agreement. My delegation also rejects the dissemination of hate speech and corrosive rhetoric on ethnic and religious issues, which deepens divisions and undermines the reconciliation process in the country. We call on the authorities to lead by example and to refrain from divisive speeches or actions that could undermine trust in their communities. Only through respectful dialogue and the strengthening of the rule of law — without impunity — can a peaceful, secure, multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence be guaranteed. In that regard, we firmly condemn the denial or glorification of war crimes, which continues to inflict pain on victims and society. Ensuring accountability for such crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence, is critical to the country's reconciliation process. We are also concerned about the recent political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina that have threatened to undermine the progress made over the past 27 years. We hope the parties will put aside their political interests and demonstrate their unconditional respect for the country's national institutions and the Dayton Peace Agreement as a mechanism for the consolidation of peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In conclusion, the Security Council should maintain its commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the Dayton Agreement. In that regard, Ecuador will continue to express its support for the work carried out in that country by the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the area of peace and security.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates): I would like to thank High Representative Schmidt for his briefing, and I also welcome the participation in today's meeting of Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and the European Union.

Nearly three decades on from the 1995 Dayton Agreement, significant progress has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Last year's elections saw all political parties fully engaged. Though the elections presented some challenges, we commend all parties for resolving electoral differences peacefully. This is yet another important milestone in Bosnia and Herzegovina's development as a nation.

The United Arab Emirates believes that maintaining and promoting political stability is essential if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to build upon and engender a lasting peace. The recent formation of the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important step forward for the people of the Federation and for all citizens of the country.

For today's discussion, I would like to emphasize three points.

First, encouraging tolerance and peaceful coexistence is necessary for achieving sustainable peace, especially in diverse societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United Arab Emirates is convinced that a cornerstone of a peaceful future for all is deep respect for human fraternity, tolerance and coexistence. Promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding for people of all backgrounds can serve as a foundation for a safe, secure and prosperous society. Local and grass-roots efforts to promote intercommunal dialogue play a crucial role in supporting longer-term peacebuilding, and we are encouraged by such efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are often spearheaded by the younger generation.

Secondly, we continue to stress the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of political life and decision-making in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women play an essential role in supporting reconciliation efforts in post-conflict societies. Their full inclusion is essential for the country to achieve sustainable peace. As such, we encourage efforts to strengthen the participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

Thirdly, as the country builds towards a more prosperous future, due consideration should be given to economic development. The United Arab Emirates is a firm believer that economic development is key to sustaining lasting peace and can play an important part in facilitating post-conflict reconciliation.

To be truly effective, economic development must be inclusive, ensuring that women and youth — and people from all communities — are able to benefit from

it. Equitable economic development strengthens social cohesion and integration and builds resilience against hate speech and attempts at provoking ethnic tensions.

I would like to take this opportunity to strongly reaffirm my country's support for the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in line with international law and the Dayton Agreement. We strongly support the work done by both the national and international institutions supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the Office of the High Representative, the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the institutions established out of the Dayton Agreement.

We urge all actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to engage in good-faith efforts to resolve the ongoing political disputes and avoid ethnically and religiously charged language — or any language that can inflame tensions.

At this critical time in the region and the world, it is more important than ever to focus on promoting a stable political climate and bringing about the promise of peace and prosperity.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank the High Representative, Mr. Christian Schmidt, for his insightful briefing. We appreciate and fully support his efforts and active engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the presence of the Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mrs. Željka Cvijanović. We also take note of the letter from the member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Denis Bećirović, addressed to the Security Council, regarding the participation of the country in this meeting.

As we heard from the High Representative, the reporting period has been dominated by intensive political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the establishment of executive institutions, at all levels, following the general elections in October. This is an important step towards a normal functionality of the Administration, at all levels.

The decision taken by the European Council in December to grant European Union-candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina is a historic milestone from the European perspective of the country, with a positive impact for the entire region. This is a clear and bold message by the European Union (EU) in

favour of more commitment and strong support for transformative reforms. It is the only way forward for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All stakeholders should come together to work and fulfil the 14 key priorities identified by the EU Commission — a road map for the opening of EU accession negotiations. In that respect, more substantial work is needed for the full implementation of the 5+2 agenda.

Making progress towards EU integration would be, by far, the best and most meaningful investment for the future of the country since the Dayton Agreement. That will require resolute steps to strengthen the rule of law, democratic governance, and fundamental freedoms and to ensure equal rights for all. It also represents an opportunity for the increased participation of women and a wider involvement of young people in a process that will define their future.

Last week, on 5 May, Bosnia and Herzegovina commemorated the killing of 1,601 children during the siege of Sarajevo, between 1992 and 1996. Many of them were slaughtered while being selectively and intentionally targeted by snipers, in just one of the barbaric acts perpetrated under the men convicted as genocidal war criminals, Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić.

While we highly appreciate the amendment brought by the High Representative to the Law on the Center for the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide, any attempt to rewrite history must be dismissed. History cannot be undone. It can help only to understand the collective past and serve as a lesson for better decisions in future.

We remain deeply concerned about developments in the Republika Srpska that are a blatant and intentional violation of the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Attempts to establish the Republika Srpska's ownership of select properties that fall under the jurisdiction of the Bosnian State are unacceptable. Furthermore, the celebration of the unconstitutional Day of Republika Srpska, on 9 January, as well as calls upon the judges representing the Serbs in the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina to resign and attempts to politically influence the judiciary at large are just the latest moves and part of a continued policy of provocative actions, with clear intentions to break up the country.

It has become a pattern, almost a ritual. The leader of the Republika Srpska never misses an opportunity to use his own country as a punching bag, attacking unity, undermining the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its normal functioning. While his duty and responsibilities are to participate in the common institutions, his policies and actions demonstrate the contrary.

Let us not forget that Milorad Dodik has been put under sanctions precisely because he is in syntony with those, inside and outside the country, who work night and day against the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, against justice, cooperation, understanding and reconciliation in the country and in the Western Balkans, against the confirmed and accelerated Euro-Atlantic path of the entire region.

We commend the active engagement of the High Representative to stop these dangerous dynamics in Bosnia and Herzegovina and urge him to continue on that path. We also recognize and fully support the stabilizing role of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Any push for more assertive, aggressive and unconstitutional policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina are a stab in the back to the unity and functionality of the country and its future. The persistent actions and policies of Republika Srpska today are the recipe of how to make a country dysfunctional. Such actions and policies were not agreed in Dayton; they are not inscribed in the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina; they have not been condoned by anyone in Europe and they are not what the country and the entire region need nowadays. Leaders and the politicians of the Republika Srpska seem to have forgotten the consequences of fomenting ethnic division. They seem to ignore the price the country and the region has paid in the past, although many wounds are still open. They are wrong and must wake up because disintegration is the past, whereas cooperation in good faith is the future.

No one will ever be able to build a viable and sustainable future in Europe by glorifying war criminals, denying genocide, questioning the sovereignty and unity of the country and investing in hate speech and discrimination. On the contrary, the Europe of the past eight decades was built by investing in reconciliation and by working together for mutual benefit, where there are no losers, only winners. That is why we think that the current Republika Srpska is

not, cannot and will not be the model for politics in the Western Balkans. It should not be allowed to break the backbone of the country or the spirit of cooperation and understanding that is now prevailing in the region.

Thirty years ago, a terrible bloody war nearly tore Bosnia and Herzegovina to pieces. The Dayton Agreement put an end to that war. Peace has since prevailed, but it has not completely delivered. The impatience of the country's young people is the alarm bell signalling that politicians are late or slow. It is therefore time for everyone there to come together for the common good and work on a single agenda, which is meeting the people's aspiration for a common and better future. Anyone standing in the way of that should be cast aside.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me start by welcoming the participation of the High Representative in this meeting. Mr. Schmidt and his Office continue to play a crucial role in contributing to a stable and secure Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is therefore important for the Security Council to have an informed and open dialogue with Mr. Schmidt on the situation on the ground.

The United Kingdom wants to see Bosnia and Herzegovina move forward as a democratic, stable and prosperous European country. We welcomed the formation on 28 April of a new Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A functional and effective Government is vital to countering hostile actors, making progress on Euro-Atlantic integration and implementing reform. While it was regrettable that the High Representative had to take executive actions, Mr. Schmidt, along with the international community, had repeatedly encouraged domestic politicians to come to an agreement and form a Government. His executive powers remain a necessary tool when the situation requires it. We urge all actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to set aside narrow interests and promote collaborative and constructive politics in the coming period. That includes halting attempts to frustrate governance and working together to agree on an alternative to the permanent amendment to the Federation Constitution before May 2024. We welcome the proactive approach taken by the new Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and hope to see such activity continue.

We remain concerned about the dangerous, divisive and secessionist rhetoric and actions from the Republika Srpska leadership. As the High

Representative makes clear, the Republika Srpska authorities continue to undermine State institutions in an attempt to damage the integrity of the State. Recent authoritarian legislative moves threaten peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region. Against that backdrop, it is more important than ever that the Security Council maintain its support for the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and the High Representative. The United Kingdom remains firmly committed to the Dayton Agreement and its associated international structures. We welcome all efforts towards meeting the conditions set out for their closure, including the 5+2 criteria. We remain a committed member of the Peace Implementation Council in support of the territorial integrity and fundamental structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single, sovereign State made up of two entities. We also recognize the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina's effective work in maintaining peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It continues to play a vital role in regional security.

Now is the moment for all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to show courage and leadership, rejecting the politics of division and hatred in favour of cooperation and constructive engagement. That is essential if the country is to deliver stability and prosperity for all its citizens.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the presence of Her Excellency Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the representatives of Serbia, Croatia and the European Union (EU).

Since the general elections last October, the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been generally stable, which we welcome. China's position on the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina is consistent and clear. We respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the choice made by its people for the future of their country. All parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina are encouraged to engage actively in constructive dialogue for national reconciliation. It is our hope that all the parties will prioritize the interests of the country and its people, enhance mutual trust and jointly safeguard political stability in the country.

Regarding the High Representative mechanism and the selection process for the post, China's position remains unchanged. The role of the Council in the

process of appointing a High Representative cannot be denied and that role constitutes established practice. For some time, the use of Bonn powers has caused considerable controversy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The High Representative mechanism and its Bonn powers are special arrangements for special periods. The international community should adopt a fair, balanced and prudent approach to the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina and provide constructive assistance in a manner that adapts to the developments on the ground and meets the real needs of the people in the country.

We should also point out that unilateral sanctions that are not authorized by the Security Council have no foundation in international law. They will not help to ease the differences among the various parties and might even intensify tensions. We urge the countries concerned to stop imposing sanctions, exerting pressure and interfering in the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the past year, economic growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown positive momentum. However, the country is still dealing with challenges such as inflation, serious unemployment and population outflow. Its economy and people's livelihoods are under pressure. The international community should step up support to help it rise to its development challenges. On the other hand, the country should create a fair, just and non-discriminatory business environment for foreign enterprises, which will help to attract foreign investment, create employment opportunities and promote the country's sustainable economic and social development.

We support all efforts conducive to safeguarding peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and commend the constructive role played by Serbia, Croatia and other countries in the region. We hope that the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue its active role in maintaining security and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the participation in today's meeting of Her Excellency Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We note with deep concern that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has entered a qualitatively new and dangerous phase. The Western community has become directly involved in the systemic internal political crisis in the country. External forces, acting

through the Office of the High Representative and a number of international presences in Sarajevo, are openly manipulating the deepening inter-ethnic and inter-party tensions, blatantly abusing the role assigned to them in the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are particularly concerned about the destructive activities of the self-styled High Representative.

The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board previously agreed on a course towards handing over full responsibility to the Bosnian peoples, which has been cast aside and forgotten. By blatantly interfering in Bosnia and Herzegovina's internal affairs, the pseudo-High Representative's behaviour in that sovereign and independent European State evokes some of the worst colonial traditions by interfering in the Constitution of one of its entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its penal code and electoral laws have nothing to do with facilitating the implementation of the Peace Agreement, no matter how hard Mr. Schmidt and his Western sponsors try to suggest that. The situation is already so out of hand that Mr. Schmidt is taking decisions on the composition of the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As for the Constitution, we cannot neglect to mention the work of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which while it is supposed to guard the interests of the country, is increasingly becoming a tool to serve Western capitals, often acting in conjunction with the Office of the High Representative. Indeed, even today three of the nine judges serving on the Court are foreign nationals. Now it is a German, an Albanian and a Swiss who are caring for the well-being of the country's citizens. That is a particularly blatant example of how not to respect the sovereignty of a country in the twenty-first century, let alone one in the centre of Europe. By crudely reshaping the most important areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina's domestic political life according to their own point of view, which is completely untethered from reality, these external forces are only multiplying the problems and making them chronic ones. They give off an impression that they are addressing the essential issues. Frankly, the repercussions of this criminal actions will affect generations of Bosnians, and in all honesty, and with a sense of responsibility, we want to warn the Security Council about that right now.

The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board has become a club of interests that is clearly opposed to the interests of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Once again, it has become clear that our decision to suspend our participation in the Steering Board was both timely and fully justified. We demand that the process of dialogue and consensus be resumed. The Office of the High Representative itself should be shut down as soon as possible. It has done nothing but harm to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its peoples. The Western experiment on Bosnian society has run its course, and it is time to free the people of the country from humiliation. The increasingly frequent mass protests against the activities of the Office of the High Representative testify to the relevance of that argument.

The goal of the West's strategy is quite clear and should mislead no one. Using its illegal toolkit, the Office of the High Representative is supposed to radically reshape the political scene at every level of Government, destroy the system of balance between the country's peoples, ensure the presence of Brussels- and Washington-controlled forces and drive the country into the arms of NATO in defiance of its peoples' sovereign will. The result would be a disaster not only for the region, but also for the whole of Europe. The Council cannot turn a blind eye to the lawlessness that is happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dayton's multi-ethnic vision for the country is in danger. The Western countries' classic neocolonial Western approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina poses a real threat to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Worse, it is undermining the very foundations of Bosnia and Herzegovina's statehood and violating the fundamental rights of its constituent peoples, thereby ratcheting up the tensions yet again.

We will refrain from commenting on the so-called report of the so-called High Representative. In our view it is impermissible to disseminate the fabrications of a private individual as a Security Council document. We emphasize once again that there is not and never has been a Security Council decision approving Mr. Schmidt's appointment to the post of High Representative.

We were disappointed by the fifty-fifth report of European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR-Althea), whose mandate, as we know, does not include providing an assessment of the internal political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet our attention was called to the presence of such an assessment as well as its biased political section, which does not reflect the reality on the ground. We believe that the report's deliberate exaggerations and approach laying the blame exclusively on Bosnian Serbs are

just one more projection of the interests of some EU countries onto the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina through EUFOR-Althea. In that connection, we would recommend that EUFOR-Althea's leadership focus on conducting assessments of the security situation, which has remained at an invariably good level all these years.

We invite Council members to familiarize themselves with the truly noteworthy report by Republika Srpska, which is full of useful factual material on the real situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We call on the Council to assess the situation realistically. It is vital that we do not blindly believe what the biased Western stakeholders and the illegitimate High Representative are pushing, but rather take a deeper look at the existing issues through the prism of the Dayton Peace Agreement endorsed by the resolutions of the Council. As one of the States that witnessed the signing of the Dayton Agreement, Russia fully supports the fundamental principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the equality of its three constituent peoples and two entities with broad constitutional powers. We believe that the key to solving the intra-Bosnian problems lies exclusively in engaging in inclusive inter-ethnic dialogue, without external interference, and only on the basis of the Dayton provisions.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank High Representative Christian Schmidt for his briefing and welcome the participation in today's meeting of Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since our last meeting, in November (see S/PV.9179), we have welcomed the swift formation of a new executive at the central level following the general elections held on 2 October. We also welcomed the formation of a new Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 28 April, after more than four years of a technical Government. We expect those new executive decision-makers, as well as those of Republika Srpska, to honour the political agreement reached on 12 June 2022 in Brussels by the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which calls for the implementation of key reforms to promote democracy and the rule of law within six months of the new executives taking up their posts.

We also welcome the European Council's decision on 15 December to grant Bosnia-Herzegovina the status of candidate country for accession to the European

Union. With that decision, adopted unanimously by the 27 member States, the European Union has sent a strong signal to the Bosnian people, reminding them of their common destiny with the countries of the Union. That decision marks a new step for Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to European integration. The road map for moving forward on that path is clear, especially for the opening of accession negotiations. It includes 14 priority reforms set out by the European Commission. France hopes that the newly elected authorities will commit resolutely to implementing those reforms, which are essential to the country's rapprochement with Europe, and which will bring tangible improvements to the lives of all Bosnian citizens, particularly in the area of the rule of law.

We call on all the political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to refrain from any provocative or secessionist rhetoric and actions, especially anything that calls into question the country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Such actions are unacceptable, and we call on the political representatives to take responsibility in that regard; they must work to reduce tensions and engage in constructive dialogue. France also underlines its deep concern about Republika Srpska's recent declarations and legislative initiatives aimed at limiting freedoms by targeting the media and non-governmental organizations. If they are definitively adopted and implemented, they would represent a step backwards in terms of the protection of fundamental rights and European rapprochement in the country. I would also like to remind Council members that in a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is moving forward on the European path, there is absolutely no place for revisionist discourse or the glorification of war crimes.

France fully supports the work of the Office of the High Representative, which we know is not intended to last beyond what is necessary. In 2008, the 5+2 agenda clearly established the conditions for the end of the High Representative's mandate, but we are not there yet. We also reiterate our full support for the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has played a fundamental role in stabilizing Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region since its deployment in 2004.

In conclusion, I hope that its candidate-country status will bring an impetus for change in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, I reiterate, is not an end in itself but a starting point on the road to negotiations for accession to the European Union.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): We greatly appreciate High Representative Schmidt's participation here today, as well as his briefing. I also want to thank Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for her participation in today's meeting.

The United States has long advocated for the democratic and prosperous future that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have chosen and deserve. We will continue to support the country as it builds towards a more flourishing and secure future in the Euro-Atlantic community of nations. We congratulate the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the formation of its first new Government in eight years. That was an enormous accomplishment, and the Office of the High Representative and its authorities played a critical role. Now is the time for all levels of the Government to seize on the positive momentum generated by the formation of all of its institutions. Now is the time to make real and tangible progress on reforms for a more democratic and prosperous future.

We urge officials to avoid actions that threaten the Dayton Peace Agreement or undermine the country's Euro-Atlantic integration. Local leaders must rise above ethno-nationalist agendas and focus, instead, on restoring accountable, transparent and efficient governance. For too long, ethno-nationalist parties have undermined democratic institutions and engaged in corrupt behaviour for narrow personal and political gain.

Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik's secessionist rhetoric and attacks on basic rights and freedoms lead down a dangerous and isolated authoritarian path. He has called for the creation of a special unit to "monitor" the inter-entity boundary line, which could lead to a soft partition of the country. And he has taken steps that have undermined State-level institutions, silenced the media and civil society, targeted lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex individuals and raised tensions and security concerns.

We are very appreciative of High Representative Christian Schmidt's work, which has been vital to keeping the international community informed of ongoing efforts to ensure enduring stability and prosperity in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. The Office of the High Representative plays a key role in ensuring implementation of the civilian aspects of the

Dayton Peace Agreement and has been instrumental in ensuring that key institutions, including the judiciary, continue to function.

The United States remains committed to combating endemic corruption and the undermining of State-level authorities. We remain steadfast in our support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity and multi-ethnic character and urge the international community to continue engaging with the country's leaders at all levels of Government.

In conclusion, the United States fully supports the High Representative and his ability to exercise all necessary authorities, including the Bonn powers, until the 5+2 agenda is complete. The High Representative and his Office needs the Council's support, as well as that of the international community, in his work.

We also urge the Council to continue to support the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina which has been vital in maintaining a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique wish to thank you, Madam President, for convening this important debate on the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering the period from 16 October 2022 through 15 April 2023. This meeting allows the Security Council members to be informed on the latest developments on the ground. We express our gratitude to the briefer, Mr. Christian Schmidt, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for his useful insights. We welcome the presence of Her Excellency Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We note that general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina were held amid a tense atmosphere in October. Despite that situation, we commend the efforts of the country's House of Representatives to end the political deadlock by appointing a new Government on 28 April, after months of protracted negotiations. However, we remain worried about the current political climate, characterized by divisions along ethnic lines, lack of unity and the fragmentation of the society.

While the criminalization of genocide denial has had a general preventive effect, it is disconcerting that the denial of genocide and glorification of war criminals still occur, particularly in the political arena. We agree with the High Representative that this compounds the

pain and harm done to the victims and the society. More importantly, that behaviour undermines reconciliation efforts between the communities and peoples.

In that connection, we encourage all parties involved to refrain from using nationalist and divisive rhetoric and to uphold the purposes and principles contained in the General Framework Agreement for Peace and the constitutional framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mozambique encourages the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in their efforts to promote reconciliation, peace, stability and development throughout the country. It is our firm belief that there can be no peacebuilding without true reconciliation, there can be no nation-building without collective healing from the past. We therefore urge the international community to continue supporting such efforts.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank High Representative Christian Schmidt for the detailed inputs, and welcome the participation of Mrs. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We would like to reassure the Council of Japan's unwavering support for the High Representative and his Office. Recognizing the importance of the role of the High Representative, Japan has been contributing a fair amount of the budget of his Office since its inception. I also welcome the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the meeting.

More than 27 years have passed since the brutal conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina came to an end. Achieving prosperity is critical, not only for the country's future but also for the peace and stability of the Western Balkans.

Japan strongly supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and national unity, regardless of ethnicity, religion or political affiliation. Since the Dayton Peace Agreement, Japan has been consistently providing assistance to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in areas such as health care, education and demining. Our support for nation-building and national reconciliation efforts continues to this day.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now facing an important juncture. It has transitioned from conflict to peace, but the question remains how it can achieve a successful future. In that context, Japan welcomes the formation of the Governments at State and entity levels, including the Federation Government that was recently established

under the initiative of the High Representative. Japan encourages all the elected politicians to unite and move forward towards constructive nation-building.

Japan is deeply concerned about the statements and actions challenging the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity that would undermine the foundation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. We strongly urge all political leaders to have a constructive attitude for the future of the country.

The accession of the Western Balkans to the European Union is an important step towards attaining a united Europe. We hope this will present an opportunity for the country to further advance the necessary reforms to achieve greater integration.

In conclusion, Japan remains committed to supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina's prosperity through steady development. We will continue to work towards peace and stability in the Western Balkans.

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

I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Christian Schmidt, for his briefing. I welcome the participation of the collegial Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Switzerland has been involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire Western Balkans region for more than 30 years. Our countries are closely linked. More than 60,000 people from Bosnia and Herzegovina live in Switzerland. We contribute to the lasting peace, security, prosperity and good governance of the country. To that end, we also support efforts to better integrate the country into European institutions and welcome its achievement of candidate status in the European Union.

With the aim of implementing the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement, Switzerland supports the Office of the High Representative. While its role is key for the time being and its presence is necessary, the main goal remains to advance towards the end of its mandate by accomplishing the reforms essential to the progress of the 5+2 agenda. We also recall the important work of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is making a substantial contribution to peacekeeping in a region facing renewed tensions.

The most recent report of the High Representative shows that the difficulties in Bosnia and Herzegovina have deep roots which require lasting solutions. To that end, I would like to emphasize three aspects.

First, cooperation among all political actors serves the interests of the entire population of the country. Switzerland welcomes the swift formation of the central Government following the elections last October. We encourage the political leaders to use that constructive momentum and to seize the opportunity of the recent formation of the Government in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to advance reforms and strengthen government institutions. Sustainable progress, however, requires the support of all members of society. That includes full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all political levels and decision-making processes. Long-standing stereotypes and the lack of efforts to promote their participation have contributed to their underrepresentation in public office. The reconciliation processes would benefit from greater participation of women. We welcome the references to that issue in the High Representative's report and encourage a gender analysis throughout his work.

Secondly, the unity of the country must be strengthened by respect for diversity and fundamental freedoms. While recognizing the positive human rights developments in key areas, we are concerned about the persistence of hate speech, the glorification of war criminals, historical revisionism and attempts to deny genocide. They jeopardize the peaceful and multi-ethnic coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Switzerland is concerned about the separatist and nationalistic rhetoric of some representatives in recent months, especially in Republika Srpska. We call for refraining from that type of rhetoric. We also remain concerned about the violation of fundamental rights of citizens. Fighting against the violation of those rights and against discrimination will make it possible to move towards reconciliation and deal with the past. That includes a greater commitment to justice and reparation, including for unresolved cases of enforced disappearances and conflict-related sexual violence. Finally, the rights of minorities must be protected and the freedoms of the media and association must be guaranteed.

Thirdly, young people must be given a central place in the decisions that determine the future of their country. They represent an indispensable potential for the whole society. Young women and men are

particularly affected by the long-term consequences of conflict. Their exodus illustrates the impact of the political, economic and social challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To counter that trend, their voices must be heard. In addition, they should be able to benefit from initiatives to encourage dealing with the past and better social cohesion, especially through education. Young people must be empowered to become agents of change for peace and prosperity.

Switzerland will continue to support Bosnia and Herzegovina on its European path. I reaffirm our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, as well as for its united, peaceful and multi-ethnic future.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mrs. Cvijanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina): I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council.

I am encouraged to hear so many statements indicating that the Governments represented in this meeting all share the same objective — a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is sovereign, independent, stable, functional and prosperous.

With this shared goal in mind, I would like to emphasize three points that any informed observer must agree are key to accomplishing it.

First, and most important, the only realistic path towards this shared objective is adherence to the Dayton Accords, including the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution, which incorporated a formula for power-sharing among the three major constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which share a long history of conflict. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution was carefully designed based on the recognition of that simple reality and established a system with decentralized authority and important power-sharing mechanisms in order to give each of the groups confidence that it will not come under the rule of the other groups. That carefully crafted system has successfully preserved peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina for more than 27 years.

Since the Republika Srpska, the entity that elected me to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, is mentioned so many times in this Chamber, I would

like to note that in Dayton, the Republika Srpska agreed with the other parties to be part of a highly decentralized Bosnia and Herzegovina in which all competences belong to the two entities except for those few competences that the Constitution expressly assigns to Bosnia and Herzegovina-level institutions.

In the decades since the Dayton Accords were signed, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been contorted into a much more centralized system, owing almost entirely to foreign interventions, rather than legal, democratic actions. If we all share the common goal of a sovereign, independent, stable, functional and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina, then the most important thing that the Security Council and its members can do is to support the Dayton Accords by word and deed and condemn actions that would undo the carefully crafted system of checks and balances guaranteed in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution.

My second point is that, despite some heated rhetoric, the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, in fact, quite stable, as the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has recently confirmed. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not at all the powder keg it is alleged to be by some who seek more foreign intervention and control over Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is true that Bosnia and Herzegovina often finds itself in a state of political tension, but that condition is typical among most democracies, including many of those represented in the Chamber today.

And that brings me to my third point. The primary threat to Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability does not come from charged political statements, but from the failure to faithfully implement the Dayton Accords. Quite simply, if the deal struck in Dayton is not honoured, then there is no hope for Bosnia and Herzegovina's success.

There are two particularly pernicious ways in which there has been a failure to adhere to what was agreed in Dayton. The first is the illegal transformation of the role of the High Representative from a facilitator into an autocrat with unlimited powers vastly exceeding the strictly limited mandate agreed in annex 10 of the Dayton Accords. The despotic powers claimed by the High Representative are even more expansive than those of a foreign viceroy, as they are asserted to be completely immune from any limitations or oversight whatsoever.

Successive High Representatives, having almost no relevant experience in the region and few relevant credentials for the position, have ruled by decree with no local hearings, no consultation with elected bodies or officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina and no due process whatsoever; and they have done so with no authority granted by the Security Council or by any valid legal instrument or international organization. Those dictatorial actions have resulted in a flood of rash, ill-considered, humiliating decrees — more than 460 pieces of legislation and regulations, 110 amendments to the entity Constitutions and 249 extrajudicial punishments of individuals — all with no legal authority or oversight.

Despite widespread agreement, even among former High Representatives, that the High Representative's claim to rule by decree is utterly illegal, Mr. Christian Schmidt has rashly announced additional disruptive decrees that have infuriated large segments of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population. His latest edicts purport to amend the criminal codes of both of Bosnia and Herzegovina's entities, yet again make a mockery of the rule of law and represent just the latest brazen usurpation of the democratic rights of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to rule themselves, rights that the Council has pledged to protect.

Furthermore, shortly before my travels to participate in this meeting, Mr. Schmidt, whose appointment the Council failed to approve, threatened that if I had the nerve to question his legitimacy before the Council, I would receive an answer I would not like. That attitude that Mr. Schmidt has shown towards the elected officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, unfortunately, typical of the attitude of too many foreign officials who come and go in my country. Their arrogant, dismissive and disdainful attitude towards legally elected and broadly supported domestic officials and institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, to say the least, unhelpful and becomes particularly absurd when those officials sharply criticize the entities for proposing laws mirroring those that have long been in place in those diplomats' own home countries. Remarkably, those officials, who work to usurp the constitutional authority of democratically elected officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina on a daily basis, complain when local officials do not bend their knee and honour their illegal assertions of authority, and so we are accused of a failure to communicate.

The High Representative's dictatorial rule is not just patently illegal, but it is also very counterproductive, as has been attested in recent years by former High Representatives. The Office of the High Representative's looming presence and constant attempts to micromanage Bosnia and Herzegovina suffocate the democratic process and hinder the unfettered internal dialogue and reconciliation essential to Bosnia and Herzegovina's future success. Indeed, the Office of the High Representative's ill-advised interference more often creates rather than solves problems, as demonstrated by the way it has generated and inflamed the controversy regarding the ownership of public property.

Initially it was widely accepted that the Constitution left public property to the entities, an understanding used as the basis for various Bosnia and Herzegovina laws still in force and upheld by the Constitutional Court. Even statements made or supported by influential foreign officials in 2008 also demonstrated acknowledgement of entity ownership of public property. The issue was never in dispute until former High Representative Paddy Ashdown, with his typical imperial attitude, intervened to create the entire controversy. Years later, in 2012, when the parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed to a resolution of the public property issue, the deal was quashed by then High Representative Valentin Inzko simply because it was not driven by the Office of the High Representative and crafted to his liking. Uncertainty regarding public property, caused solely by Office of the High Representative meddling, now hinders cooperation and progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the issue has been seized upon by those seeking to further centralize Bosnia and Herzegovina in contravention of the Constitution.

If Bosnia and Herzegovina is ever to be sovereign, independent, stable, functional and prosperous, then it needs to be governed not by unelected foreigners issuing despotic decrees according to their own preferences and prejudices, but by its own Constitution and its own citizens, in accordance with democratic principles and the rule of law. The truth of that statement must, I think, be obvious to all members of the Council, but it is perhaps particularly clear to the many countries represented in this Chamber that have proud histories of freeing themselves from despotic imperial rule by certain foreign Powers. And it must also be acknowledged by the members of the Council that the rule of law needs

to be honoured not just by local leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also by those foreign officials who have long been ignoring or even actively subverting the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution agreed in Dayton, who have been routinely and cavalierly violating the prohibition against foreign diplomats meddling in local politics of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and who have been influencing judicial cases that should be decided only in accordance with the Constitution and proper judicial integrity.

This points to a second important threat to the constitutional order in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unfortunately, some of the greatest distortions of the constitutional structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been caused by the very institution established to uphold it — the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court. The Office of the High Representative frequently complains that the Court's rulings are not being respected by the entities. The same Office of the High Representative has hypocritically decreed that its own edicts are totally untouchable by the rulings of any court in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Remarkably, the Office of the High Representative never addresses the reasons why the Court's decisions are met with scepticism, which is due to the corruption of the judicial process by the interference and influence of the Office of the High Representative itself, along with that of certain foreign Powers, as well as the effective control of the Court by its three foreign judges. Those foreign judges, who were meant to be a part of the Court for only the first five years of its operation, do not live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have no educational background in the laws of our country, do not speak the local languages and issue contorted rulings that many agree read like political acts meant to please certain foreign Powers rather than soundly reasoned legal determinations.

When a court ignores judicial propriety and the constitutional limits of its own authority and issues decisions that are *ultra vires*, that court naturally squanders the respect of the citizens and the other branches of Government. And when such decisions are the product of a voting bloc of foreign judges subject to outside influences, it is clear why such decisions lack credibility.

It is in the context of that total usurpation of the democratic process in Bosnia and Herzegovina by outside Powers and the corruption of our judiciary that so-called secessionist rhetoric and other political expressions of extreme frustration in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be understood.

As for the Republika Srpska, its official policy remains what it has always been: the Republika Srpska is committed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to the constitutional order established in the Dayton Accords, and it is committed to peace above all. But it is not ready to accept illegal, despotic rule by high representatives and unconstitutional decisions of the Constitutional Court, nor to have its constitutional, democratic rights trampled and be treated as a colonial possession of certain foreign Powers.

Somehow the Republika Srpska has ended up in a sort of Orwellian position where complaints about the distortion and degradation of the Dayton Constitution are said to be anti-Dayton. The hypocrisy of such allegations, coming from some who actively subvert the Constitution agreed in Dayton, is astonishing.

If members of the Security Council will read the latest report of the Office of the High Representative (S/2023/318) in that context, then they may understand that, to many of us in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the report reads like that of a colonial viceroy to the home office, complaining that the locals, who are too ignorant and uncivilized to rule themselves in a constitutional democracy, do not respect and appreciate the benevolent despotism of the viceroy's overlordship. And if Council members will read the latest report from the Republika Srpska, they will see that the Republika Srpska cannot be accused of being some renegade State simply because it calls upon foreign officials to respect international law and the constitutional democratic rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens.

I again thank the members of the Council for their concern about the future of my country. I ask the Council to support Bosnia and Herzegovina by advocating the full implementation of the Dayton Accords as written and condemn foreign meddling in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which undermines the Accords, violates the rule of law, corrupts our judicial system and hinders political cooperation within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As the most important concrete steps in that direction, the Council should make clear once and for all that the High Representative does not possess the despotic authority to rule Bosnia and Herzegovina by decree and confirm that our institutions at all levels of administration are entitled to make decisions in accordance with our Constitution.

I am convinced that Bosnia and Herzegovina can have a successful future if the Dayton Accords are faithfully implemented with the support of the Security Council. And I will add that I am trying to introduce a touch of reality in this debate today in the Council. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a fairy tale and is never going to be a fairy tale, but it can become a decent country if our Constitution is respected and honoured by all parties inside and outside Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: I will speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 27 member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova all align themselves with this statement.

Since the Security Council last met on this agenda item (see S/PV.9179), Bosnia and Herzegovina has achieved the status of EU candidate country, indeed a very significant step for the country and for the European Union and not irrelevant for the Council. That status is based on the understanding that the steps specified in the European Commission's recommendations are taken, in order to strengthen the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organized crime, migration management and fundamental rights. In the current geopolitical context, the EU underlines the urgency for the country to move forward on its EU path, in particular via fulfilling all 14 key priorities for the opening of EU accession negotiations identified in the Commission's opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership. The EU also calls on all political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to swiftly implement the commitments set out in the agreement reached on 12 June 2022 and urgently finalize the constitutional and electoral reform in line with the key priorities.

The European Union urges all political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to refrain from and renounce provocative divisive rhetoric and actions, including questioning the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country, and to end the glorification of convicted war criminals, as well as genocide denial, and instead actively promote reconciliation.

The European Union is concerned over the legislative initiatives and announcements in the Republika Srpska entity, including secessionist rhetoric, that are not in

line with the EU path of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism, as well as freedom of operation of civil organizations, are key pillars of a democratic society. Credible, genuine measures, including proper implementation, to address shortcomings in the area of the protection of fundamental rights comprising non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to minorities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, are urgently needed.

(spoke in French)

The European Union welcomes the inauguration of the new Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the new Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the elections held in October 2022. The European Union calls for the rapid establishment of a functioning government, including at the cantonal level, with a view to focusing on the reforms needed for EU membership.

The European Union reaffirms its full support for the efforts of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continues to assist the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in maintaining a secure environment for all citizens.

The European Union reaffirms the importance of continued cooperation among international actors and expresses its support for the mission of the High Representative and his Office in the implementation of the 5+2 agenda.

(spoke in English)

We reiterate our unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country.

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

Mr. Stevanovic (Serbia): Today we are addressing the issue that has been on the Security Council's agenda for a long time. This is a testimony to the difficult legacy of the Yugoslav crisis and the complex challenges in the post-war period.

Nevertheless, we must remind ourselves of major achievements that have been often taken for granted. In the words of the report of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and Herzegovina is stable, and there is no threat to its stability. That was the case for the last 27 years, and despite all the political bickering, that is the case now.

I also want to echo something mentioned here. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a platform for any proxy conflict. Nobody in the country wants to be somebody's pawn on the broader geopolitical chessboard. That is equally important for the country's stability and should not be overlooked, despite all the pessimistic predictions.

The stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a direct result of the much-criticized Dayton Peace Agreement. Serbia believes that honouring the Dayton Peace Agreement is necessary for international trust-building and the functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The constitutional balance of power between the two entities and among the three main ethnic groups should guarantee equal rights in their joint pursuit of shared goals and common interests. Each unilateral move results in a new challenge and adds to futile attempts to achieve the upper hand in the decision-making process. Therefore, the only path forward for each and every subject in that country, as well as the country as a whole, is through dialogue and agreement.

In that context, allow me to state once again that Serbia is consistently and permanently committed to preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is in line with the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement and Serbia's signature on it. Moreover, it reflects our strict adherence to the principle of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, which must be honoured always and without distinction.

Accordingly, Serbia considers issues, such as the marking of the Republika Srpska Day, the functioning of joint institutions, the property law and election laws, internal matters of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are hopeful that the institutions formed after the elections will provide sustainable progress for the country, its entities and constituent people.

The countries of our region need an acceleration of the European Union enlargement process and steady progress in reforms more than ever before. We welcome every step taken by Bosnia and Herzegovina in that direction, as it brings us closer to our common European future.

Strengthening comprehensive regional cooperation is an important part of our European integration. It is also essential in dealing with the same strategic challenges.

The emigration flow and demographic trends are extremely negative. The region is losing its people. The brain drain threatens to leave Bosnia and the whole Western Balkans deficient in what has always been our primary resource — skilled and educated people. It is for that reason that we call on all the regional countries to embark on the Open Balkan Initiative. That is a regionally driven initiative. It allows the full synergy of our capacities through the free flow of people, capital, goods and services. It should better prepare us for the common goal of membership in the European Union, originally based on the same principles.

Finally, having mentioned all our concerns, I want to point to something that speaks highly of our common hopes. Last week, my country suffered the terrible tragedy of losing 17 predominantly very young lives caused by two mass shootings. On that occasion, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared a day of mourning. Mr. Konaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Mr. Stojanović, Vice-President of the Federation entity, visited the elementary school in Belgrade, the scene of one of the shootings, to pay tribute to the victims. Those acts of solidarity go beyond any words, as does the gratitude of the Republic of Serbia. That should serve as a reminder that we have too much in common to question our joint future.

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

Mr. Ćurić Hrvatinić (Croatia): I thank the High Representative, Christian Schmidt, for his briefing.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union (EU) on behalf of its member States. I would also like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

First of all, we would like to wholeheartedly congratulate Bosnia and Herzegovina on becoming an EU candidate country. That is a significant achievement, and we believe it presents a strong incentive for Bosnia and Herzegovina to focus on reforms and the welfare of its citizens.

We also welcome the successful formation of Government at the state and Federation level. Taken as a sign of improved functionality, we wish success to the new Government in pursuing reforms and advancing on the path to the EU. Equally, we hope that cooperation

and democratic dialogue will be accepted as formative principles in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is also prerequisite if the country is to use the opportunities of the current momentum and achieve tangible results on its way to the European Union and Euro-Atlantic international structures.

Croatia supports the work of the High Representative Schmidt, especially regarding the promotion of functionality and political stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be fully aware of their responsibility to respect the authority of the High Representative and his Office.

Political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina should show utmost determination and political will, with the full sense of responsibility for the country's future and continue, with the aim to complete, the work on constitutional and electoral reforms. We are convinced that only the full respect for the principles of equality among constituent peoples and the non-discrimination of all citizens, as enshrined in the Dayton–Paris Peace Agreement, can bring about lasting political stability to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As a neighbouring country and one of its most significant trade partners, Croatia will continue to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of European integration, development, the building of strong and resilient democratic institutions and other important reforms. In this sense, Croatia is looking forward to the joint session of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to be held in June.

We wish Bosnia and Herzegovina, its peoples and citizens every success and a positive outcome, and Croatia remains ready to support and help in that regard. It is to that end that Bosnia and Herzegovina can now also use the strengthened perspective of European stability, peace and prosperity.

It is up to the political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to resolutely pursue this course. We call on the political actors who have not yet done so, to abandon the policy of obstruction and division and to truly contribute to creating a better future for all in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The meeting rose at noon.