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Security Council extends European Union force in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 21 (AP) -- The U.N. Security Council extended the European Union's peacekeeping force in Bosnia for a year on Wednesday, citing the Balkan nation's "very limited progress" towards EU membership and its failure to implement key reforms.

The resolution adopted unanimously by the council had a markedly downbeat tone compared to last year's resolution, which welcomed "tangible signs" of Bosnia's progress toward joining the 27-nation European bloc.

Twelve years after a peace agreement ended a bitterly divisive 3 1/2-year war, the council reminded the country's Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats that they have "the primary responsibility for the further successful implementation" of the 1995 agreement signed in Dayton, Ohio, which ended the conflict.

But it noted "that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made very limited progress towards the European Union, and in particular, towards the conclusion of a Stabilization and Association Agreement despite the fact that the text ... has been finalized."

Bosnia was ravaged by Europe's worst fighting since World War II from 1992-95, in which 100,000 people were killed and 1.8 million were turned into refugees. The country is in turmoil again because the Dayton agreement divided Bosnia into two mini-states - a Bosnian Serb Republic and a Muslim-Croat federation - and the Bosnian Serbs are resisting efforts to unite the country as the EU is demanding.

International efforts to unite the country have been supported by the Muslim-Croat federation, which would like to see Bosnia enter the EU as a unified country. But Bosnian Serbs are insisting that their mini-state - Republika Srpska - remain as autonomous as possible, and they have resisted EU demands to integrate the separate police forces in the two mini-states, putting the country's progress toward EU membership on hold.

The council reiterated its call for Bosnian authorities "to implement in full their undertakings" as confirmed on Oct. 31 by the Peace Implementation Council, which comprises more than 40 countries and international organizations who oversee the peace conditions that followed the Bosnian war.

The Peace Implementation Council's steering board on Oct. 31 backed proposals by Bosnia's international administrator, Miroslav Lajcak, to strengthen the ability of the central Bosnian Parliament and other bodies to enact further reforms. His proposals - which Bosnian Serbs are resisting - would change the way a quorum is calculated in order to make it more difficult for lawmakers to block decisions simply by not showing up.

The Serbs are hinting they may try to split the former Yugoslav republic in two if Kosovo is allowed to secede from Serbia.

European Union defense ministers expressed concern on Monday about political tensions and pledged to maintain the EU's 2,500 peacekeepers in Bosnia.

The Security Council resolution welcomes the EU's intention to maintain the EU military operation and authorizes the force, known as EUFOR, for a further 12 months starting Wednesday. It also welcomes NATO's decision to continue to maintain a headquarters in Bosnia to assist in implementing the Dayton accord.

The council also reminded Bosnians of their commitment to cooperate with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia by handing over all those indicted for war crimes and assisting its investigations.

Bosnia's two most wanted fugitive suspects are wartime leader of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadzic and his top general, Ratko Mladic, both charged with genocide and crimes against humanity.