

Speech by Paddy Ashdown, High Representative, to the RSNA

2 November 2004

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, Mr. Speaker, can I thank you for the opportunity to address again this distinguished gathering. As you know I take the view since I have arrived here that appearing before the parliaments of BiH and of being available to answer questions is part of the accountability which I hope to have as High Representative toward elected representatives of the peoples. This is not my first occasion. I have addressed you, of course you might argue that it has been long since I last had the privilege talking to you and answer your questions.

My speech will be rather frank and fairly short. Because I want to leave as much time as possible for questions, which I think are most important part, and because my message is rather simple one.

Nearly a decade after the war, that ravaged this country, BiH now stands at the gates of a much brighter future – a future as part of modern Europe , and in due course a member of NATO and of the EU. That is the way, ladies and gentlemen – the only way – to give this country a chance your children the security and opportunities they deserve.

Whether those gates will open up before us, or remain locked against us, now depends on you.

It depends on one issue – and will be decided in one place: right here in Banja Luka.

And you know what that one issue is, very well. And that is the single thing about which I would like to address you.

Issue is very simple. It is whether the authorities of Republika Srpska, in the next few weeks, can overturn nine years of failure to fulfil your international obligations to The Hague – nine years, during which the RS has been in fundamental breach of the Dayton agreement, upon which the existence of the RS itself and the peace of the whole country, depends.

I shall return to that in a moment.

But first, I want to describe to you where I believe Bosnia and Herzegovina currently stands today and to lay out for you the opportunity, the opportunity which you and this national assembly have helped to create. I want to describe the opportunity which are ahead of us.

Two and a half years ago, when I first came here, few would have dared to predict that, by the end of 2004, Bosnia and Herzegovina could get to the very gates of NATO and the start of the long path that leads to European Union.

But you have.

And a skeptical world is surprised – and impressed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now starting to be viewed, not as a hopeless failure – but as one of a very few remarkable examples of success in peace and stabilization.

And I want to make this point to you all because it is very, very important.

Republika Srpska and this Assembly have played a huge part, arguably the most difficult part, in that success.

You have summoned up the political will to take some very tough decisions. Tougher arguably for Republika Srpska and the RSNA than for any other part of BiH or any other institution. And I acknowledge that. And admire it.

You courageously made possible the fundamental reform of BiH's defence forces, opening the way which would otherwise have remained closed to NATO.

You did the same by reforming the intelligence community.

And you recognized that you needed a single indirect taxation authority – which your leadership argued for and got based here in Banja Luka – so this country will be able to attract the investment and stimulate the new jobs it so badly needs. And that is the crucial breakthrough that has enabled this country to apply for European Union associate membership.

None of these things would have happened without your agreement; and if they had not happened, the door to Europe, and to NATO, would have remained tightly shut.

And what has been the result of these bold and far-sighted decisions and reforms?

Well the prize is right before you. The prize is within your reach.

By next year this country could join NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and begin a serious negotiation with the European Union on a Stabilization and Association Agreement—the first, formal step on the road towards membership in the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are very significant steps and it is not over exaggerate to say that you have surprised the world, being able to take them – and the RS, its leadership, and in particular this Assembly, have played a very large part in achieving this.

And without that success and your part in it, this country would have no future.

For a future in Europe future in NATO is the only future you can have. It is the only future your citizens can have where

ever they comes from, where ever they live.

Why?

Because NATO means, quite simply, no more war – what greater gift can there be than that for every citizen of war-ravaged Bosnia and Herzegovina?

And membership in Europe means a future in which you and your children can have the freedom to travel not remained locked in one of Europe 's forgotten enclaves.

In which foreign investors will look at Bosnia and Herzegovina as an emerging opportunity, not a disaster area. In which you, as Europeans, can become, again, full members of the European family of nations and peoples.

That's the opportunity this country has now won for itself and it is only weeks or months away.

And let me say again, this has not been an easy road. I know that and I understand. It has not been an easy road for Republika Srpska, it has not been an easy road RSNA but you have made the bold and forward-thinking choice to accept these reforms and make these opportunities possible.

So let me ask you now this question.

If none of these things could have been done without you – why do you now fear that the whole constitution can be changed without you?

Why do you allow yourselves to be provoked by others into fears about the future of the RS?

Your situation could not be clearer.

If you adhere to Dayton, you can depend on Dayton.

If you adhere to Dayton – a change to the constitution cannot be imposed upon you.

I cannot do it. Even if I wish to, and I do not.

The Bosniaks cannot do it.

The Bosniaks and the Croats together cannot do it.

It can only be done if you agree – if all three peoples agree.

If you adhere to Dayton than the only way to change Dayton is by agreement between three constituent peoples. There is no other way.

So, why do you allow yourselves to be provoked by others threats? It's not them you have to fear.

Now I happen to believe that we are, in due course, going to have to consider the constitution.

A state cannot survive if it spends over 65 per cent of its citizens' taxes on government and only 35 percent on its people. Sooner or later the dysfunctionality of this state BiH will become the greatest cause of instability and the greatest threat to BiH's future.

So, sooner or later, this will have to be addressed. But not now, not now – nothing should distract us from the aim of getting through those twin gates to Europe and NATO, which lie ahead of us.

And when that moment for change does come – as I believe it will – it has to be done with you and by you – it cannot be done without you.

Provided you adhere to Dayton.

But Ladies and Gentlemen there is the problem.

You are not adhering to Dayton . And you are not adhering to the Constitution of this country.

Let me remind you of the paragraph which you and your leaders endorsed. Article II Clause 8 of the BiH Constitution couldn't be clearer. It says that:

'All competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina shall cooperate with... the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia...'

It is specific in your Constitution, a central pillar of Dayton itself.

Here is the tough message.

Now you are in clear and obvious breach of that Clause – and you have been for a full nine years.

But your representatives explicitly signed up to that provision at Dayton and at Paris . It's enshrined in the Dayton Agreement.

You know now, as they knew then, exactly what it meant.

Here is the difficult, hard fact.

For nine full years, Republika Srpska has utterly failed to abide by those provisions – not just in part, but totally. It's been as if this clause of Dayton simply didn't exist, or were written in invisible ink.

For nine full years you have failed in your international obligations to co-operate with The Hague.

There is no other way to put it.

For nine full years, the authorities of Republika Srpska have failed to co-operate even in the smallest degree in the detention of Radovan Karadzic or Ratko Mladic.

For nine full years you have failed to arrest a single war criminal.

This is not just to flout international law, and to defy the values and the principles of the Europe you want to be part of: it is also to flout, fundamentally, a cardinal principle of Dayton.

Now, I wonder what you would be saying if one of the other two constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina had failed for nine full years to fulfill one of the key stone conditions of Dayton.

I wonder what you would be demanding International Community to do in those circumstances?

So, Ladies and Gentlemen – that question again.

I don't understand why you allow yourselves to be provoked by statements about constitutional change from others that have no basis in reality, when the real threat lies not in such statements but from your own failure to fulfill a condition of Dayton – for nine full years.

Here is the hard fact.

The real threat to the RS and its competencies does not lie in Sarajevo or anywhere else – it lies in Banja Luka.

So, finally, this job has now got to be done. There is no other way. No ifs, no buts, no more excuses.

And there are perhaps only weeks left to do it.

And let me make one thing clear.

I want you to succeed in this. The International Community is wanting you to succeed and willing you to succeed.

But only you can do it.

It is only this, now, which stands between you and success.

One final point. Some argue – President Cavic is one – that

the time has come to change the nature of the international community's engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina , to something less interfering and less intrusive.

Perhaps I agree with that – more than you can imagine. Perhaps the moment is arriving when that should happen. Perhaps President Cavic is right.

And, the moment – here is the point – Bosnia and Herzegovina is through those NATO and EU gates and on its way to Europe, the role of the international community here has to change. It must change because Bosnia and Herzegovina can only get to Europe as a fully sovereign state.

That means changing my job and changing international community's job.

So, if that's what you want to happen, and I guess it is, than make sure we get through those two gates as soon as possible.

It is in your interest, in the interest of every one of your citizens and in interest of fully sovereign BiH with less interference of international community.

Let me tell you again, that should be a matter of only a few months, so get us through those gates as soon as possible.

Here is my single message to you today.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, one major barrier – only one – now separates you, your children and your grandchildren from the path to success, which you have done so much to win.

You know what it is.

You have to remove it.

Don't delay.

Just do it.

Please.

Soon.

Thank you.