

Article by the High Representative, Carl Bildt: "I Can't Bomb The People of Bosnia Into Friendship"

Six weeks into my job as high representative, appointed by the Dayton Peace Accord, I can be under no illusion about the difficulties we face in consolidating the peace in Bosnia. As I write, Bosnian Serb soldiers are being held by the Federation government as alleged war criminals, and the Republika Srpska (the Bosnian Serb republic) has announced that it will not take part in any further meetings on Bosnian Federation soil. Reconciliation is a difficult word to use this week.

Nevertheless, I am personally convinced that Bosnia can make the transition from being a bitterly divided country to a peaceful and even prosperous society not far from the heart of Europe. Its people have the skills, the talent and the quality to achieve this. But just because it can be achieved and should be achieved, does not mean that the transition will inevitably be successful.

There are enormous challenges ahead, from the huge damage to the country's physical infrastructure to the deep well of bitterness between Bosnia's peoples, which is the residue of four years of war.

The task can only be achieved if, on the one hand, the international community makes its contribution to economic reconstruction and political rehabilitation; and, on the other, and even more important, if the people of Bosnia can work together to recreate a country at peace with itself. As high representative, I am closely involved in both these areas.

The civilian aspects of the peace process are more difficult to define than the military ones. The agreement reached at Dayton in November last year was highly specific about the details of military engagements and the ending of the war. It was less clear on the ways to create peace. Military implementation has been broadly successful so far, and I salute the many Americans and even more the European troops, not to mention those from further afield, who have achieved so much.

Although the implementation force (I-FOR) has still not reached full strength, I am confident that the main military goals of the Dayton agreement will be achieved over the next six weeks. My side of the agenda will take longer. The work of the high representative has four main aspects:

- To monitor implementation of the agreement.
- To co-ordinate international efforts to help Bosnia through the transition, from economic assistance to human rights and refugee questions.
- To prepare the way for free and fair elections in which the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) will play an important role.
- To assist the parties themselves in achieving co-operation and reconciliation.

These words are all more abstract and less precise than the words used to ensure military compliance. They are not the stuff of deadlines or headlines. Admiral Leighton Smith can always call for air strikes if the armies he faces do not behave. For my part, I cannot bomb the parties into friendship with one another. Nor can I threaten the international community if it does not give the finance necessary to relaunch the Bosnian economy.

Nevertheless, I have found in this short period that there has been much that I and my still rather small team has been able to do.

In my view, the highest priority is to bring the peoples of Bosnia, Serbs, Croats and Muslims, into a dialogue with one another. Even under their present political leaders, who have been abusing each other for the past four years, they must rediscover a common language. Bosnia is perhaps the most deeply divided society in the world. But it once had a rich history dominated by tolerance rather than ethnic extremism. Under the Dayton agreement, which all of its political leaders have accepted, it is obliged to forge a common future. And all that I see on the streets of Sarajevo or Banja Luka, Mostar or Gorazde, convinces me that this is what its people want.

We have set in train a process of dialogue which, in its early stages, brought results perhaps more quickly than we expected. Under the terms of Dayton, I set up a body called the Joint Civilian Commission, which brought the leaders of the Muslim-Croat Federation into discussion with the leaders of the Republika Srpska early in January.

We focused on Sarajevo where we saw the most immediate problems, and established a number of sub committees to deal with questions such as housing and infrastructure, telecommunications and the police. It was encouraging to see the parties working from the ground up on sensible measures which would improve the quality of life in Sarajevo and, in the fullness of time, would help to re-unify the city. It was even more striking to see old friends, who had sometimes shared offices before the war, embracing after four years of mistrust and even hatred.

Nevertheless, I have no interest in overstating our progress towards reconciliation, particularly in a stormy week like this one.

There are three other areas in which my office has been especially active. We are working closely with the World Bank and the European Union to encourage a speedy injection of development aid. The high representative has no budget of his own. I do not lead an executive agency in this or any other field. But I have to spearhead the international efforts to raise the necessary funding, and I do give my views where this can be useful. There was a successful conference in Brussels in December when some \$500 million was pledged for urgent projects. The World Bank estimate that ten times that will be necessary over the next four years to repair infrastructure and lay the basis for sustained economic growth.

I do have concerns here. We need still greater urgency than I see from donor nations if we are to jump-start a ruined economy with successful projects in crucial sectors like power, roads and telecommunications. I also believe more attention must be paid to identifying good projects in the Republika. There must be seen to be a peace dividend for everyone.

A second area to which I give great importance is human rights. I am as concerned as anyone about war crimes. We must be unflinching in our determination to bring proven war criminals to justice. At the same time, this does not mean that possible suspects should be interned without due process of law, either domestic or international.

Apart from that there is a delicate job of co-ordination on human rights questions between the wide variety of international organisations which have been active throughout the war.

The third area I would mention of the many more with which I am concerned does carry a deadline. Under Dayton, there must be free and fair elections at the latest within nine months of the start of the process. This is a long march in a short time. But it is only when Bosnians have exercised their democratic rights and worked together to create the joint institutions envisaged under Dayton that we shall know the drive to peace is irreversible.

The OSCE and the international community can provide a framework. But the Bosnians themselves will determine whether they move forward to a new sort of politics, or retreat back to their psychological bunkers.