



HR's op-ed: Glorifying war criminals puts you on the wrong side of history

By Valentin Inzko, High Representative

Next Tuesday I will deliver my regular six-month briefing to the United Nations Security Council on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and my assessment of the state of implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

On the positive side, I will report the fact that this country recently took a major and most welcome step towards becoming an EU candidate country, the status currently enjoyed by neighbouring Serbia and Montenegro. I will also reflect the progress achieved on economic reforms by the BiH authorities as part of the EU reform agenda.

At the same time, I will need to report on rhetoric and actions taken which lead away from integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions and towards isolation. The most serious of these steps taken in the last six months has been the holding of a referendum by the authorities in Banja Luka in violation of two decisions of the Constitutional Court of BiH.

More fundamentally, I plan to highlight the contradiction inherent when, on the one hand, certain political leaders say that they favour integration with Europe, while on the other hand they misrepresent the Dayton Peace Agreement, assert that the rules do not apply to them and seek to reopen the wounds of the past.

For example, the RS President often says that Bosnia needs to return to the "original Dayton". I am not sure I understand this distinction, since the Peace Agreement has never changed and provides for the creation of new institutions, which was done through political processes in which the SNSD was involved.

But let's say, for the sake of argument, he means the exact text of the Peace Agreement. Well, the "original" Dayton - the text of the Agreement which, by the way, created the RS in 1995, as it did not exist before that - states in Annex 4 that the decisions of the Constitutional Court are "final and binding" and that the entities must comply with decisions of the state. The original Dayton also foresees foreigners in the Constitutional Court.

It couldn't be more black and white. And yet the RS President and governing institutions held a referendum on September 25 against a direct order of the court, an unprecedented step, which sent a simple message: the rules do not apply when we do not like them.

Let's look at another excerpt from the "original Dayton", Annex 7, in which the authorities, including the Republika Srpska, "undertake to create in their territories the political, economic, and social conditions conducive to the voluntary return and harmonious reintegration of refugees and displaced persons, without preference for any particular group."

I will be the first to acknowledge that most of the authorities in all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a few important exceptions, need to do a much better job to make Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and all other citizens feel welcome and integrated throughout the country.

However, in recent months, the RS authorities have seemingly sought to directly hurt and provoke those who suffered the effects of wartime ethnic cleansing. I am thinking specifically of the worrisome trend of glorifying convicted war criminals.

Besides a student dormitory in Pale which was named after Radovan Karadžić, now we have the shameful move by the RS National Assembly and its Speaker Nedeljko Čubrilović to decorate Biljana Plavšić (who admitted to committing war crimes and was sentenced to 11 years), Momčilo Krajišnik (sentenced to 27 years), and Radovan Karadžić (sentenced to 40 years for genocide in first-instance). These awards were given as part of a ceremony marking the "25th anniversary of the RSNA" which is yet another piece of historical revisionism which I would like to correct. The RS was legally established in 1995 by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina as set forth in Annex 4 to the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP). If you do the math, it is obvious that the RSNA couldn't have existed before the RS.

What contributions have they made besides, as it stands at the moment, some 80 years of prison sentences for war crimes? Is this a matter of pride for the RS National Assembly? And what message does this send to the victims of their crimes? All those associated with honouring convicted war criminals have placed themselves outside the realm of civilized values. The glorification of war criminals has never been, and never will be on the right side of history. And re-writing history doesn't make it any less true.