



Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative At a Roundtable on European Integration The Mini Balkan Summit 2010

The Moral Power of the People Will Prevail

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year has been remarkable in the history of Southeast Europe. Countries that were mired for decades in mistrust and hostility took serious steps towards rapprochement. In the beginning these steps were tentative, but very quickly a positive momentum developed.

We have seen evidence of this new spirit right across the region, but I think must above all pay tribute to the courage and innovation of leaders in Croatia and Serbia for effecting a fundamental and positive realignment of their countries.

Instead of the suspicious standoff of the past, Croatia and Serbia are now – as they ought to be – actively engaged in constructive cooperation on a whole range of matters that affect both countries, and, in many cases, that affect the rest of the region too.

The regional rapprochement has frequently hinged on issues where Bosnia and Herzegovina is central – for example in the field of acknowledging and expressing regret for wrongs perpetrated during the conflict, and in judicial and administrative cooperation to deal with war criminals and organised crime.

Therefore, resolving regional problems has often involved resolving problems inside Bosnia and Herzegovina.

But as strides have been made in improving the political and diplomatic atmosphere in the region during 2010, a paradox has arisen.

The leaders of neighbouring countries have in many cases shown themselves to be *ahead* of the curve.

While leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been *behind* it.

This has meant that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – who may stand to gain most from the regional rapprochement – have, until now, gained least.

Resolving this paradox is perhaps the most important and urgent challenge facing the BiH political establishment. Four million BiH citizens have a chance to join the rest of the region on the highway to prosperity and security. This chance cannot be allowed to pass them by because of ineptitude on the part of their elected leaders.

Progress so far

The region is moving forward at a pace and in a manner that few would have believed possible a decade ago.

The troubling fact is that that currently, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not on the right track for speedy progress towards European integration. This as was confirmed in the most recent Progress Report of the European Commission

The one bright spot is visa liberalisation.

Reforms that led to recent visa liberalization with the EU show BiH *can* meet conditions, if its leadership has the political will to make the necessary compromises. Bosnians need to assume responsibility for their own country.

The fact that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have just secured long-awaited European Union approval to visit the EU without first having to go through the time-consuming bureaucratic task of securing visa is much more than just basic convenience.

The 8 November decision by the Justice and Home Affairs Council is one more testament to the fundamental contract that exists between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans – the road to full integration is clearly laid out and remains open.

It reinforces the important message that reforms will secure real benefits that can be enjoyed by all citizens.

Reforms will systematically deliver to the people of the Western Balkans the social, political, economic and legal rights enjoyed by citizens in the rest of the continent.

Virtuous Cycle

The successful efforts of countries in the Western Balkans to move along the road to integration have created a virtuous circle, in which progress in one country facilitates progress in another.

This virtuous cycle has for several years been very much in evidence through the elimination of trade barriers under the auspices of the Stability Pact and then the Southeast European Economic Cooperation Process. This has enhanced intraregional trade, while preparing Southeast European economies to compete in the single European market.

At the start of the process, trade liberalisation in each country was challenging; but as the process gathered steam, the momentum became irresistible.

This overarching regional framework of economic restructuring, together with the coherent steps being taken in the countries of the region to align themselves with EU norms, has created fertile ground for the bilateral political and diplomatic initiatives I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks.

Regional leaders who have spoken out in order to define a more hopeful future and put to rest some of the burdens of the recent past have acted realistically, rightly assessing that now is the time for the Western Balkans to move forward confidently to a successful future.

I believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders can and will follow suit. Indeed, in this respect I would like to commend the new member of the Presidency, Bakir Izetbegovic, for his important statement during a radio interview at the start of this month, expressing regret for loss of civilian life caused by the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the conflict.

A climate for positive change

A statement, no matter how eloquent or heartfelt, will not change a country overnight – but it can *begin* a process of change, it can make change *possible*, it can help to create a *climate* in which positive change is more likely.

And Mr Izetbegovic is not alone. In the past, other party leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina have made principled and honourable statements disavowing the mindless nationalism that fuelled hatred and division for so many years.

Although in 2007 Milorad Dodik, was amongst those leaders who expressed his revulsion over the massacre in Srebrenica and said Bosnian Serb institutions should apologize to families of the victims killed by Bosnian Serb troops during the conflict subsequent secessionist rhetoric, moves to roll back reforms together and a blunt denial of the fact that genocide took place in Srebrenica make progress hard.

These declarations show the need for politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be governed by morality. There can be no moral confusion. There must be a willingness to confront the crimes of the past, and the mistakes of the past, and a willingness to move beyond the legacy of the past in order to create a better present.

I was obliged to make clear in my report to the UN Security Council at the beginning of this month that the parties have got themselves into a position where they have been unable to sustain the sort of practical cooperation that is required to get things done.

And as a result, almost nothing has been done over the last four years.

Even worse, attempts have been made to undo some of the things that were achieved in the previous eleven years.

The result of this political malaise has been a sharp deterioration in living standards and zero progress along the road to Euro-Atlantic integration.

This in a country whose people not only have the desire to succeed but also have the necessary resources to succeed.

For four years we have heard politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina saying “no”.

Saying no is invariably easier than saying yes.

I think too that it develops into a habit.

The time has come to break the habit.

And it can be broken.

New territory

We are now in new territory. Politics is cyclical. There are good periods and there are bad periods. We have certainly been through a bad patch in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But the 3 October election can be the beginning of the end of that bad patch.

With the election behind us and with the significantly improved regional environment, we have a golden opportunity to break the vicious cycle and start a virtuous one, to end the habit of saying no and encourage political leaders to start saying yes.

We have a clear path ahead, with economic and other reforms mapped out in the Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. At the same time, Bosnia and Herzegovina's international partners remain committed to providing political, economic and practical help that will facilitate progress on the road to full integration.

The International Community is going to stay proactively engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina until the job is completed – and that means until the country secures full Euro-Atlantic integration as a sovereign and prosperous state.

Domestic pressure

Ultimately, however, it will be domestic pressure, not international pressure, that brings about real change in the dynamics of BiH politics.

I have been closely involved with the country's recovery since immediately after the war and the thing that has impressed me more than anything else is the breathtaking resilience of BiH citizens.

That resilience can be channelled into making politicians do business in a more positive and productive way.

I have also seen a great deal of cynicism.

How could it be otherwise?

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been lied to by their leaders for a very long time.

And the lies have not been little lies.

We have, therefore, contrasting responses to the challenges facing the country – some people are resilient and some people are cynical and many people are both at the same time.

We have to focus our efforts on making sure that resilience is rewarded and cynicism is less and less justified.

Two weeks ago people all over the world were inspired by the conduct of Burma's pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who emerged from years of imprisonment with her determination to secure positive political change visibly undimmed.

She and the people of Burma have had to put up with enormous trials, yet she is demonstrating that in the long run it is the moral power of the people that prevails – no matter how short-sighted their leaders may be.

It was Aung San Suu Kyi who memorably stated that, "real freedom is freedom from fear."

Freedom from fear is endemic in the legal, social, economic and political guarantees of the European Union – it is this that the Euro-Atlantic integration trajectory can ensure for the peoples of the Western Balkans.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina not every politician has grasped this essential truth. Some still imagine they can buck the trend.

I do not believe that they can.

I do not believe that the people will let them.

In due course they will have to move to the front of the curve, and join those who are already there.

Thank you