

High Representative's and EU Special Representative's TV Address to Citizens of BiH



Today, on the basis of the support of the European Union and PIC member countries, I have taken the office of the High Representative of the International Community and EU Special Representative in your country. You already know what is my name and where I come from, but nevertheless I believe it is proper to introduce myself, say a few words about the objectives I have come to your country with and explain my personal view of this responsible mission.

First of all, I wish to underline that I have come here with a great respect for your country. I am deeply aware of all that it went through in the past decade. I am aware that Bosnia-Herzegovina is the country whose people suffered most during the tragedy that took place in the first half of the nineties. That is the very reason BiH, more than any other country, deserves its future to be much nicer and better than its past.

Before I took the office of the High Representative, I spoke to many people who wish your country well. They told me that the young people were indifferent towards their own country and that many would leave it if they had the right opportunity. Many lack those things that elsewhere are seen as simple patriotism and pride of the country one lives in. True, a positive attitude towards one's country is a sensitive and complex category not only here but also elsewhere; however, it

can mostly be achieved by simple means: through practical measures instead of big and pompous words. For example, by creating good living conditions – such conditions, in which a person looking for a job does not have to bribe the employer to get a job. Citizens' respect for the state they live in grows when the state is efficient and fair in penalising corruption, bribery, large-scale financial fraud, when the rule of law and respect of human rights are strengthened. The respect for the state will grow if war crime indictees are truly prosecuted, if sentenced criminals do not escape from prison, if all those who belong in prison end up there, when the arrogance of civil servants is replaced by the readiness to provide services to citizens, when education reaches a level that can compete with the European level. Practical steps that improve the quality of life of the citizens can be taken immediately, because they have the necessary powers to do that. That does not require any big political deals or difficult compromises. However, we should not ask for an ideal situation straight away. Theorising on what would be ideal has never brought any country forward.

On the other hand, much has already been achieved. With the help of the international community, significant changes took place, which improved the work of democratic institutions and bodies – for example the army and tax system, the competences of the central government have been strengthened, common security agencies have been formed. And I could go on and on like that. And yet, thinking about your country today, many people are saying that it still lacks reconciliation and confidence. Reforms seem to have stalled, momentum seems to have been lost. One does not have to be a political analyst to come to that conclusion. It is enough to look at the papers. You will literally feel the cold, malice, intolerance, accusations, mistrust. Where is the political style of today leading this country? That is a legitimate question I will ask the leading representatives of this country. The politicians in governments and parliaments are legitimate and they are in

their position on the basis of the citizens' free will. I personally am convinced that you as voters did not put them there in order to radicalise conflicts and demonstrate a lack of interest in cooperation, but in order protect your interests. And that can be done in one way only – by looking for compromises. Only compromise – meaning, defending one's own interests but not at the price of ignoring the interests of the others – is the way for BiH to move on. This simple rule will most probably have to be repeated to politicians quite often – both by myself and by you as the citizens. Nobody has ever built anything good or useful on accusations, refusals, negative emotions. In the world there is not a single example of a successful country in which politicians are not able to agree.

I must remind you that elections took place recently and we are still at the beginning of the legislative cycle. It has been less than six months since the new Government was established. The newly elected representatives still have almost an entire mandate ahead of them. We should be talking about what are their visions, what is the future of this country, in their opinion, what are the goals of political principals, where do they – and we, together with them, want to see BiH after three and a half years, when will you vote in elections again. We also have the right to ask them what they are doing in that regard. However, I do not see or hear anything like that here. Instead, I keep hearing statements and reactions to statements, the majority of which convey what you do not want, what you refuse, what you disagree with. Where does that lead you? Where will we end, if we continue in such a manner? What will the politicians have to account for before the next elections? Will they boast about how many times they refused to accept a compromise? Or will they take delight in how many agreements they prevented?

This is why I gave myself the task to help reinstate a sufficient degree of mutual trust between politicians, based

on which they could continue implementing the stabilisation of a functional country and its democratic institutions. This, in my belief, is a strong enough reason for all of us to work together on this fast road towards future, European future. I do not believe there are politicians who mean harm to their country, or with evil intent, who are pushing the country backward instead of forward. I also do not believe that there is a single person in this country who would like to see the nineties decade repeated. This is why, together, we cannot and we will not tolerate any activities or statements that push BiH back into the atmosphere of tension and hatred. By establishing an atmosphere of confidence and tolerance, we will be able to move forward also with respect to concrete political issues that BiH is faced with today.

In the midst of these mutual attacks, it seems we have overlooked the fact that the train for this country is leaving in the meantime. Just one year ago BiH was making relatively positive progress towards the European Union, and its chances and perspectives were very good. Today, this is no longer the case. We must say this openly and straightforwardly, in the process of European integrations BiH is today on the last place and it is further from the EU than any other country in your region. But that is not the only issue. This difference increases on daily basis. They are all making progress – indeed, each country in a different speed and pace, but they are making progress nevertheless. While this is happening, you are at a standstill and it seems that no one is worried about it. While other countries in the region are trying hard to do everything to prove that they deserve membership in the EU, you rather engage in mutual accusations and accusations against the international community, including the EU.

Does anyone really believe that this is a place that BiH deserves? After everything that your country went through, I do not believe that you voluntarily chose the role of the last country in Europe. While the other countries in the Balkans

region are getting substantial sums of money from Europe, getting involved in exchange programmes, simplifying travel – in other words they are opening up to Europe and Europe is opening up for them – here, no one is even mentioning Europe. And it seems that Europe is more concerned about this fact than BiH itself is. Because, if it were concerned, it would do something to change the situation.

I often hear one argument – you imposed the Dayton system, this is why you are responsible for changing it radically. With respect to this issue, I will only say the following. First: your politicians were there as well. Second: at that time, it was good that it happened. Third: we provide assistance to the extent possible, as much as it is in our power. And the possibilities are not limited by the lack of political strength. They are limited by the deep conviction in the democratic world that everything that is imposed by an outside dictate cannot be a permanent value. It is with full legitimacy that the international community is asking the local politicians to come to an agreement. This is not some kind of unprincipled balancing between quarrelling politicians, nor is it a way to assign guilt equally to everyone. It is not a way to escape responsibility. What we are demanding from local politicians is the same that we all had to go through, and the same things that we live with daily. Without constant agreements and compromise, without taking into account other interests except one's own, the European Union would not have survived a single day.

Allow me to note something and remind you that the International Community invested a lot, in human, political and financial terms, into Bosnia and Herzegovina, both during the war and in the 12 years that followed it. It did all that with one single intention in mind: to stabilize the peace and assist development of your country to make it resemble, as much as possible, any other European country that is safe, stabile, prosperous and democratic. The reason for our

continuous presence in your country and our demands to you are based on the fact that we are only asking from you to fulfill agreements that your politicians have obliged themselves to. I will say it again – what we want is not only because it is good for you, but also because we want to see stabile, safe and prosperous BiH as a part of democratic and developed Europe. We are not your enemies. We are here to help you. So, nobody should be interested to see us fail or try to work against us. To attack the helping hand means to act against your own benefit. Reasonable people do not attack one another. At contrary, our success is your success; our failure is your failure too.

I have ambitions in one more area. I want to assist you in better understanding of the world you are aspiring to, primarily better understanding of the European Union. There is no better future for BiH than its European future. Take my word for it, because I am speaking as a man who is able to compare the difference between being out of EU and being in the EU on the basis of my own experience.

I come from the country which experience, although less drastic, can still compare, to a certain extent, with yours. I am speaking about the experience related to the split of the country and the need to build completely new statehood, new institutions, establish efficient political system, overcome economic transition and create democratic civil society. It was not easy. Only some ten years ago, an international representative referred to my country as a black hole at the map of Europe. At that time our neighbors we had been following for years, shoulder to shoulder, started getting ahead of us, became NATO members and started the negotiations on EU accession. It is quite possible that it was a signal that we needed to wake up, so to speak, and focus on crucial issues: our own future and future of our children. It took only seven years, which is historically speaking an extremely short period of time, for us to join NATO, which happened

three years ago, and the EU as one of the best prepared countries.

Slovakia is today a very successful and dynamic country of the EU, which many see as a miracle. However, there was no miracle. We only focused on the objective that had been drawn up by the ruling coalition, at the time, composed of different political options. The objective was the EU membership, which was the basis for success. And not only that. Economy is now developing very successfully; many investments are forthcoming; new jobs are being created; salaries are increasing. The EU membership had a positive impact on every single segment of life of ordinary citizens. It is not by accident that the support to EU in my country is now even greater than it was at the time of our accession to EU. I personally participated in that process and I know what we did well and which mistakes we made along the way. I would like to share this experience with you.

But you may say: your circumstances were different, there was no war in your country, please do not make any comparison. But I still do, and I am under impression that, due to the suffering BiH citizens went through, they deserve more than anybody else to be taken by their local politicians to the gates of EU.

I would like that all of us together stop speculating on so-called Bonn Powers of the High Representative. These speculations cause division and blur the focus – on one hand, they create unnecessary tension and cause unrealistic euphoria, on the other. I want that all of us who are participating in the project of building stabile and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina – citizens, local politicians and representatives of the international community – to base ourselves on a single political category: responsibility. In this process each one of us has his/her own responsibility that he/she must be aware of and act on it. For my part, I assure you that this is the exact way in which I am

going to act.

I have not come to BiH to demonstrate you or myself what powers I have in my hands. Trust me I came to BiH because I wish to help this country, because I want BiH to move forward. Should it be necessary to use my powers, in the interest of achieving this goal, I will not hesitate.

In just a few days many people will assemble in Srebrenica – the place where the horrible crime happened, where the genocide was committed, which the International Court of Justice confirmed. I hope that many of us would be in Srebrenica. Apart from members of the victims' families to which we will again express our condolences there will be also many political representative of entire Bosnia and Herzegovina's political spectrum. Above all it is compassionate to express due respect to the Srebrenica victims. And yet at the same time it will be an opportunity to remember all victims of the war atrocities in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Justice must be served. The culprits must be punished on their merits. While speaking about the past we nonetheless should not stop thinking about the future. The past must not be an impediment on the path towards the future. We need justice for that, which is indeed fair, objective and unbiased. Those who in any way were active participants in then complex political events cannot interpret justice, as they cannot be objective. It will not help the Srebrenica victims and it will be harmful to the citizens of present Bosnia and Herzegovina if anyone starts to build its political agenda on this tragedy. We need an approach as the one demonstrated by my personal envoy Ambassador Bond with his local partner Igor Davidović. The path that is based on assistance, revitalization, projects and hope for Srebrenica – that is the path that leads ahead.

The first working day in Bosnia and Herzegovina is behind me. I took over my office from my predecessor Dr Schwarz-Schilling

whom I thanked for his efforts and for preparing the office for transition under my administration. Immediately after that I visited the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina to introduce myself to your collective leadership and above all to express respect to the state where I am going to live and work in the name of the International Community. Even though it is the first formal meeting I am encouraged with the outcome. All three highest BiH representatives promised me their maximum assistance and gave me assurances that they would endeavour to overcome stagnation period and make a step forward on the European path. I will take them at their word and I am going to build on that. I would like to hear the same from other representatives of this country I am going to meet and talk every day. That is why I am sure that we will together with you, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, succeed in this.