

Remarks by Head of OHR Mostar Office Anatoly Viktorov

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Politics only matters when it affects the livelihood and wellbeing of citizens, and nine times out of ten this happens at the municipal level. Laws are simply *ideas* until they make their way into the municipal rulebook.

All of you, I think, will be familiar with the difficult recent history of Mostar. In the streets around us the political and military drama that characterized the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were played out with an intensity and a human cost greater in many instances than that experienced elsewhere in the country. And the drama unfolded in Mostar in a very distinct way.

This pattern has continued in the decade since Dayton . Mostar has witnessed reconciliation and obstruction, economic stagnation and partial recovery, interminable political and legal antagonism and, at the same time, a capacity – familiar throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina – to find a way round large (often unnecessary) difficulties and produce workable solutions.

The whole spectrum of politics has been on view here, set

against a backdrop of core civic issues – such as housing, education, infrastructure repair, the provision of services and amenities, and job creation.

So what we are seeing in municipal politics in Mostar is a reflection of the wider politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina and at the same time an example of how citizens' interests are being addressed (not always in the most effective way) in the context of one urban community.

Today, the influence of BiH national politics is largely benign – because the country is now very clearly committed to Euro-Atlantic integration and the benefits that this can bring. The details of Stabilization and Association negotiations may not be familiar to most people, but the values that underpin the 21st century community of states in Europe are, I believe, understood and accepted by the vast majority of citizens.

These values include upholding and defending the principles of an independent judiciary and police so that citizens have legal protection and physical security; promoting job creation so that individuals as well as corporations will benefit from economic growth; respecting international conventions (including the European Charter on Local Self-Government), not because these exert some kind of magical power but because they have been shown in other countries to work; developing a citizens' society that acknowledges and respects human rights; and providing a proper education and a promising future for children and young people.

This is what Euro-Atlantic integration is about, and this is what most of the reforms being undertaken at the BiH level are about. Countrywide, we are beginning to see these values make a positive impact – there has been, for example, substantial progress in improving the BiH business environment so as to generate investment and new jobs; there has also been positive movement in regard to police and judicial reform.

It is no accident then that the same principles underlie the political initiatives being undertaken in Mostar.

As ever, Mostar is a microcosm of what is happening nationally, and at the same time its experience is distinct.

So, how is Mostar doing in respect of advancing European values? What progress is being made at the municipal level to promote an independent judiciary and police, job creation, the application of international conventions, the construction of a citizens' society, the proper provision of education?

Well, had we asked these questions just a few weeks ago, the answer would have been negative.

The city failed to adopt its 2006 budget until the end of May.

There was what I can only describe as a scandalous absence of concern about this on the part of the principal parties in the municipal assembly.

Mostar citizens, I need hardly say, were considerably more concerned. Indeed they were outraged by the apparent callousness of their political representatives.

Adopting the budget took much longer than it should have taken, but – importantly – agreement was finally reached.

The failure of the political establishment to share the sense of urgency felt by the population bodes ill for the development of a citizens' society. But then again such a society will only come into being when those forces that have been excluded from the political mainstream – youth groups, trade unions, business associations and so on – *demand* inclusion. Ahead of the October election this demand is increasingly being made, in Mostar and throughout the country.

In regard to job creation we have yet to see a real commitment on the part of political leaders, who remain deadlocked over the issue of establishing an Urban Planning Institute. Those

of you visiting Mostar for the first time may have been impressed by the amount of building work going on. The problem is that in the absence of a modern zoning system this work is being carried on in a very haphazard way, which means that the volume of construction is less than it should be – hence fewer jobs – and construction is less coordinated than it should be – hence fewer benefits for the city as a whole.

The lack of construction coordination has meant that Mostar is now regarded as a candidate for UNESCO's list of *endangered* World Heritage Sites.

This is a sad reflection of the city's reality. A combination of political and administrative mismanagement has compromised the status of Mostar's priceless architectural heritage.

The failings of Mostar's administration are often failings of omission rather than commission. Delays in restructuring the city government have meant that a wave of new civil service appointments has been held up – so offices that are supposed to be dealing with pressing issues related to the delivery of services are understaffed, or not staffed at all.

Mostar citizens, however, are becoming increasingly vocal about this and other problems.

At the same time, the kind of service that that administration should be delivering is becoming increasingly clear, as BiH moves further along the path to Euro-Atlantic integration.

Citizens know what they want and they have a clearer idea of how the municipality should be delivering this.

Politicians are catching up.

Despite its shortcomings municipal government in Mostar has come a very long way. I am confident – and I believe the people of Mostar are increasingly confident – that this city can complete its journey to full recovery, with the aid of

those core European values that have been embraced by the people of Mostar and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

Thank you