

BiH Must Put Its Citizens First

The High Representative in BiH, Paddy Ashdown will deliver a speech in Geneva tomorrow (Friday) morning at a conference on the future of BiH entitled "Ten years of Dayton and Beyond" marking the 10th anniversary of Dayton.

The High Representative will say that BiH is moving into a new era, and will note that the start of Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations with the EU will mark a decisive shift away from the country's post-war Dayton reality. He will say that the country in the last ten years has never had such a clear view of its future as it has now. "BiH stands at the watershed between postwar stabilization on the one hand and transition towards Europe on the other. From here on we have a clear view of where we are going and what has to be done in order to get there".

Outlining that with the adoption of the EC endorsed Agreement for Police reform the last major reform barrier to the EU has been removed the High Representative will note that "the basic institutions necessary for the smooth functioning of the state have been established – now they have to be made properly functional".

The focus must now be to create a state that puts its citizens first, not its politicians, he will say. "This means reducing the cost of government, optimizing expenditure by eliminating the duplication of services across different tiers of the sprawling administrative system, and bringing civil service salaries into line with the country's capacity to pay", he will say.

Once the SAA process is secured, the need for constitutional change will become more apparent, the High Representative will

note. He will express a view that Bosnia and Herzegovina has perhaps come as far as it can under its present constitutional apparatus: "BiH now must make changes that will allow it to continue on the path towards full sovereignty and stability, and above all which will channel funds away from government and directly to citizens. No state can win the loyalty of its citizens when it spends 70 percent of their taxes on government and only 30 percent on services to the people themselves".

He will welcome the fact that constitutional change is increasingly being discussed by Bosnians themselves, but will note that changing the constitution will not change Bosnia and Herzegovina – it will only remove the constraints to change.

The High Representative will say that constitutional change is only possible through dialogue and consensus. It cannot be imposed and done by outsiders. "This has already been successfully done on several occasions – where the advantages of derogating competencies to the State have been compelling" he will say.

The full speech given by the High Representative will be available to media representatives tomorrow.