High Representative's Open Letter to the Citizens of BiH

On the occasion of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Statehood Day, in a week when the people of BiH mark nine years since the preliminary signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, sent the following open letter to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Anniversaries can often be contentious – yet in commemorating the Dayton Peace Agreement there is a remarkable degree of consensus among BiH politicians and – more importantly – among the people of BiH.

Dayton , for all its faults, ended the war.

That has been its enduring achievement, and no one, absolutely no one, can discount this achievement.

But the agreement initialled at Dayton nine years ago, and formally signed in Paris two weeks later, was a *framework* agreement. It didn't provide all the answers. It provided the foundations within which the people of BiH could find permanent solutions to the political and social challenges that confront them.

Building peace wasn't accomplished at Dayton . () Dayton was only the beginning.

Building peace has been a process, that is only now well on the way

And this is because there is a new and powerful incentive to look forward rather than back. If Dayton was about *escaping* from the nightmare of the war years, European integration is about *arriving* in a better place.

That better place is a prosperous, democratic and secure

Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged in (and benefiting from) the processes through which the Europe of the 21st century is beginning more effectively to serve its citizens.

That is what Bosnia and Herzegovina Statehood Day is about. That is why every single person in this country, man, woman and child, of whatever religion or group, can and should celebrate this day.

This is not an empty celebration, but a celebration of progress. Bosnia and Herzegovina is making great strides.

Let me mentions a few of the achievements of this year:

- The State Court is starting to deliver real results. Indictments and trials of the previously untouchables are beginning and will continue – proving that the rule of law isn't just a luxury for a few prosperous countries
- The establishment of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council in May means that we are on course for BiH to start trying its own war crimes cases.
- The process of unifying Mostar has moved forward decisively. The opening of Mostar's bridge in July symbolized the extraordinary process made in knitting together communities so recently torn apart by war. New first city council session composed according to the new statute has been held.
- legislation providing for the direct election of mayors was adopted in time for 2 October municipal elections. The first Brcko District elections were held – a precondition to normalising the district's autonomous status and paving the way towards winding up the supervisory regime.

On December 2 SFOR will terminate and NATO will hand over leadership of the military mission in BiH to the European Union. Our destination is Europe and Europe is beginning to

take over the international lead in helping us get there.

Bosnia and Herzegovina , like its neighbours, is focused on the twin strategic goals of qualifying to begin negotiations with the European Union on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement; and gaining admission to NATO's Partnership for Peace programme.

Embarking on SAA negotiations and entering PfP will move BiH decisively forward. It will lock the country into a framework that will pull forward the reform process, and initiate the steady transformation in the International Community's role in BiH, including the eventual phasing out of the position and office of the High Representative, as the role of helping the process of stabilization and transition to Europe shifts more and more to the tasks of the High Representative's other hat, that of the EU Special Representative

Nevertheless, there is one major obstacle to Bosnia and Herzegovina 's progress – and that is the systematic failure of the RS authorities to co-operate with the Hague Tribunal.

Co-operation with the ICTY is an absolute pre-requisite for entering PfP and starting EU membership negotiations. It is also a fundamental requirement of Dayton.

Failure to co-operate with the Hague Tribunal meant that Bosnia and Herzegovina was refused entry into NATO's PfP in June. Failure to arrest a single ICTY indictee is an affront to the values of the very institutions that Bosnia and Herzegovina wishes to join.

BiH's institutions and individuals, and especially those of the RS, cannot continue to block BiH's path to the EU and NATO. Bosnia and Herzegovina must not miss the opportunity for a brighter future. The people deserve it. It is within reach.

We have much to celebrate on this Statehood Day.

Of we seize the opportunity that is before us and move forward with the twin objectives of beginning SAA negotiations and entering PfP there will be even more to celebrate next year.