Remarks by Paddy Ashdown, High Representative and EU Special Representative in BiH, to the Conference ‘Beyond Cold Peace: Strategies for Economic Reconstruction and Post-Conflict Management’

Panel Discussion on Timing, sequencing and prioritisation in post-conflict management

There’s always a danger with events like these that people offer sage advice which may be true and valuable in their own theatre, but which is wholly out of placed and misplaced in another.

Bosnia , Kosovo, Afghanistan and now Iraq have taught us that each situation is different, and requires different solutions.

But there are some common themes, and we need to identify them.

Because while we have been become good, very good, at winning the sharp, short hi tech wars of the last two decades -we can now do it almost by numbers -we are far less good at winning what Kipling called “The savage war of peace”.

Principles for peace-making

Shortly after Baghdad fell, I spoke about the seven pillars of peace making that could be said to apply more or less universally. I believe these have, more or less, survived the difficult period since then.

The first is the importance of having a good plan and sticking to it. This needs to be drawn up, not as an after-thought to the fighting, but as an integral part of the war planning for the military campaign. Because the process of peace building begins in the first second after the midnight hour when the war ends.

The second principle is the over-riding priority, as we have discovered in Bosnia , in Kosovo, in Afghanistan and now Iraq , of establishing the rule of law – and doing so as quickly as possible.

Crime and corruption follow swiftly in the footsteps of war, like a deadly virus. And if the rule of law is not established very swiftly, it does not take long before criminality infects every corner of its host.

This, above all was the mistake we made in Bosnia . We took six years to understand that the rule of law should have been the first thing. We are paying the price for that still.

The third lesson is that it is vital to go in with the authority you need from the start. On the military side, that means establishing credibility straight away. The more effectively a peacekeeping force copes with early challenges, the fewer challenges there will be in the future.

On the civilian side, this means starting off with the powers needed to get the job done, rather than having to acquire them later, as we did in Bosnia to our cost.

The fourth principle is that it is vital to start as quickly as possible on the major structural reforms – from putting in place a customs service or reliable tax base, to reforming the

police and the civil service, to restructuring and screening the judiciary, to transforming the armed forces, and above all to pushing through the structural changes that will restart the economy. Long-term success always depends on these fundamental reforms: the sooner they are embarked upon, the sooner the job will be completed.

It is vital – and this is my fifth principle – that the international community organizes itself in theatre in a manner that enables it to move fast and take decisions. You can't re-build war torn countries by committee, or by remote control from several thousand miles away.

Then there is the question of the breadth of the international effort. It takes many nations to win the peace. And it is vital – repeat vital – that the international agencies speak with a single voice, and use the diplomatic 'sticks and carrots' available to them. In Bosnia , at least, the tactical use of targeted conditionality is crucial to delivering results.

The sixth principle is the importance of an exceptionally close relationship between the military and civilian aspects of peace implementation. Civilians depend on the military if they are to succeed. But the military depend on the civilians too if they are to succeed – witness Iraq : both need each other.

The final lesson is perhaps the most important of them all.

Building things up takes much longer than knocking them down.

That is true – literally true – of buildings, of homes, of bridges, of power stations.

But changing the software of the state – building judiciaries and police forces and public administrations, let alone changing the minds of its citizens, takes a very long time indeed.

The conclusion is obvious. Winning the high tech war may take weeks. But winning the peace that follows is measured in decades.

There are three other factors that are necessary for the success of post-conflict reconstruction in Bosnia . I believe these also apply to Kosovo, Afghanistan and even Iraq , but I leave that for others to judge.

The first factor is legitimacy. Or put another way, agreement on what we are trying to rebuild, or is most of these countries, build for the first time. Not only amongst the key nations and international agencies I referred to earlier, whose participation is vital for success. But even more crucially, amongst the people and the political, economic and social leaders of the country we are trying to assist

In Bosnia , we have the Dayton Peace Agreement. It is fashionable now to say that it is out-of-date and has become a straight-jacket. That may be true and it certainly needs to evolve. But what I do know for certain is that the enormous progress Bosnia has made since 1995 would not have been possible without it. It has provided the agreed plan for rebuilding Bosnia . Agreed by the international community, whose leading members signed it. And agreed by the Bosnians as the basis for ending the war. It provided the legitimacy for international engagement and the basis for our partnership with Bosnia ’s domestic politicians and institutions.

The second factor is regional stability. I am now confident today that Bosnia and Herzegovina will survive as a state, albeit not a centralised one of classic European tradition – more Belgium, probably, than France. But I am confident of that, because South East Europe is not what it was. Tudjman is gone. Croatia ’s ambitions are now focused on Brussels , not Bosnia . Milosevic is in The Hague , overthrown by a democratic revolution

And the third factor is a destination. That's more than just an agreed framework for reconstruction. It is a goal that can motivate the people of war-torn countries to make the sacrifices necessary to transform their societies, their economies, their political systems, in a way that lasts. Bosnia has a clear destination. It's called Europe. The hope of getting into NATO and the EU has now become the main driving force of reform in Bosnia , replacing the executive powers of the international community.

Let me make one last point. It is now nearly ten years since the peace agreement was signed for BiH. The country has made huge progress. It is moving out of the era of Dayton and into the era of Brussels. It still has a long way to go. But the very fact that a country like BiH is starting to offer some solutions – admittedly born of its own tragic experience – in addressing the issues before us today is a mark of how far the place has come, and a sign to others that it really is possible to move *beyond cold peace*, if you have the will, and the staying power.