

Remarks by High Representative Paddy Ashdown On the Occasion of the Re-Opening of Mostar Old Bridge

Symbol of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Renewal

I will be very brief.

This Mostar's beloved Old Bridge has been the subject of every kind of comment today.

It is testimony to the extraordinary nature of this bridge that so many have gathered here today, from so many countries, to celebrate what its reconstruction says about Bosnia and Herzegovina, about coexistence, and about the triumph of hope over adversity.

The destruction of this bridge a decade ago brought home to many around the world the full force of the evil that was happening here. I hope and believe that its re-opening today will be an equally powerful moment. The moment when hope for the future of this country became stronger than the fear of the past.

The methodical shelling of this bridge symbolized something far wider than just the destruction of a great – world famous though it was. It also symbolised the destruction of human things – above all, of the thriving multiethnic communities for which Bosnia and Herzegovina were once so equally famous. And its reconstruction today also symbolizes the extraordinary miraculous progress Bosnia and Herzegovina has made in knitting together communities so recently torn apart.

You only have to consider how long it took Europe after WWII to get to peace, or how long it took Northern Ireland to get to peace, or the intractable problems of the Middle East , to appreciate how far BiH has come in the few years from war to peace.

So, the story of this bridge is not just one of bricks and mortar, engineering ingenuity, sublime architecture. The story of this bridge is the story of this part of Europe – its grandeur, its civilizations, its tragedies. Ivo Andric made this point in his literary masterpiece, *Bridge over the Drina*. He was writing, of course, about the Bosnia 's other great bridge in Visegrad. But he could equally have been writing about the Old Bridge here in Mostar.

Mostar's progress is both a fillip to and a reflection of Bosnia and Herzegovina 's forward momentum towards political stability, steady economic growth and a proper concentration on the issues that matter to citizens – jobs, justice, education, health-care.

This, too, matters beyond the borders of this country. Bosnia and Herzegovina's long, often difficult, frequently frustrating, usually painful but nonetheless steady ascent from the ruin of war to the benefits of peace, shows that countries *can* be rebuilt – and, indeed, they can be rebuilt relatively quickly. The International Community has helped, as we have with the reconstruction of Mostar's Old Bridge . But the real heroes of this story are the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina .

We are here this evening to mark a success that has depended upon people of this city, and the people of this country, working in partnership with people beyond our borders, working together to *build*.

That is what Suleiman the Magnificent's craftsmen did four centuries ago; it is what we continue to do today.

And as with this bridge, so with Bosnia and Herzegovina .
What seemed impossible yesterday is reality today. And that
is truly a matter for celebration.

Thank you.