

We Must Now Turn NATO's No into a Yes

The High Representative made the following statement in response to the decisions that NATO took at the Istanbul Summit yesterday concerning BiH's application to join PfP:

"The Istanbul Summit has demonstrated that NATO has succeeded in its mission to bring stability to Bosnia and Herzegovina . But Bosnia and Herzegovina has not succeeded in convincing NATO that it is committed to meeting its international obligations to ICTY.

NATO leaders recognized the remarkable progress that BiH has made in defence reform. But as they made clear yesterday, BiH has not been invited to join PfP because of its failure to meet its international obligations towards ICTY and will not be invited until this is corrected. And they publicly singled out obstructionists in Republika Srpska in particular for that failure.

Let me quote their exact words, from the communiqué signed by NATO leaders yesterday:

"We look forward to welcoming Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro into the Partnership for Peace once they have met the established NATO conditions. We want them to succeed in joining the Euro-Atlantic partnership and will assist them in this endeavour. We are prepared to assist the countries by including them in selected PfP activities. Each country will be judged on its own merits on the road to PfP.

We welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina 's significant progress in defence reform, a key condition for PfP membership. We urge continued progress towards achieving a single military force. We have agreed to designate a Contact Point Embassy in

Sarajevo to increase understanding of NATO. We are concerned that Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly obstructionist elements in the Republika Srpska entity, has failed to live up to its obligation to cooperate fully with ICTY, including the arrest and transfer to the jurisdiction of the Tribunal of war crimes indictees, a fundamental requirement for the country to join PfP. We also look for systemic changes necessary to develop effective security and law enforcement structures.”

What does this mean for BiH? Well, it is clearly a major setback for anyone who wants to see this country become a stable and prosperous European democracy, looking towards the future rather than being held hostage by the past.

Membership of PfP, and one day NATO, is the best guarantee of long-term peace and stability for this country. Yet this has been denied BiH by the actions and inactions of a group of obstructionists who believe that helping Radovan Karadzic and other indictees evade justice is more important than the security and prosperity of ordinary citizens.

As NATO has said at Istanbul , it treats every country on its merits. And NATO has decided, because of this country's unique and tragic recent history, that BiH cannot join PfP until it is cooperating fully with ICTY. It sets the conditions, not me. But I support that decision. Radovan Karadzic bears much personal responsibility for what happened to this country in the early 1990s. His capture or surrender is not only required by law and necessary for justice, it is the key act of closure on the past which has to happen before BiH can really start building its future. If BiH is come to terms with that past and move on, Karadzic and the remaining ICTY fugitives must go to The Hague and face justice.

The job of the BiH authorities is now to do all they can to turn NATO's No into a Yes. I am also considering what action I can take to assist in this process. I have one aim: to get BiH into PfP as fast as possible, which means convincing NATO

that the obstructionism of ICTY has ended, as quickly as possible. So, I am now drawing up measures to reduce the influence of those who want to obstruct this country's progress towards stability, prosperity, and the Rule of Law. And I am drawing up measures to encourage those who have the information and ability to help ICTY to do so.

We face important and difficult decisions in BiH. The future stability and prosperity of every citizen of this country hangs in the balance. We must not take these decisions lightly – but nor can we afford not to take them. In coming days, I will be weighing up the actions I must take. And as soon as I have finished my deliberations, I will inform the citizens of BiH and those affected.”