

Politics needs a new generation

It is time that young people broke the mould of politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, said in Sarajevo today.

“Yours is a perspective that is fresh, a perspective that is untainted by failure,” the High Representative told participants at the International Youth Summit. “You have the capacity to think outside the box – and the box that defines politics in this part of the world is well worth thinking outside of.”

The High Representative warned that if change doesn't come from politics, it comes from violence, of which there has already been much too much in BiH. “What there has been too little of,” he said, “is young people in politics. When *you* take action you change the way your circumstances act upon you – *you* begin to act upon your circumstances. You may fail; you may choose the wrong road; you may be mistaken in your judgment or disappointed in the outcome of your efforts – but all of that is relative. Because when you act you change the chemistry of your surroundings. You begin to have a say in how things will turn out.”

He warned young people – many of whom are understandably turned off by politics – that if they don't seize the initiative, others will. “And those who have taken the lead in the recent history of Southeast Europe have not been uniformly impressive. While nationalism, for example, has consumed political energy, pertinent issues, bread and butter issues, issues that have a direct bearing on the quality of citizens' lives have too often been neglected. Schools have gone unheated, organized crime has spread – ruining lives through

drugs and violence – and teenagers have been obliged to contemplate the dismal prospects offered by a wholly inadequate job market.”

The High Representative called on young people to wrest control of politics from individuals and interests who have exercised power without delivering much in the way of benefits to the majority of citizens. “Those who currently dominate political debate will not make way for you willingly,” he said. “You have to seize the initiative on your own account. You have to take what is rightfully yours – a say in the future, in *your* future. If there is a clarion call coming from this convention I hope it will be that the time has come for the young people of Southeast Europe to move from the shadows to the front row of politics. You have a place in the policy debate, and now is the time to take that place and create a better future for all.”