Speech by the High Representative Paddy Ashdown At the 60th anniversary celebration of Oslobodjenje

Newspapers are awkward.

I know that, because I serve on the board of one of the UK's finest, and – I am proud to say – most consistently awkward newspapers.

Newspapers are awkward because unfolding events are awkward, and opinion is awkward, and politics are awkward, and the result of last night soccer game is awkward – and good newspapers reflect the awkwardness of life. Very good newspapers reflect that awkwardness in ways that generate indignation and debate and satisfaction and rising circulation.

So, I am confident that no one will take offence when I say that I am honored to be here to celebrate the 60th anniversary of one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's most awkward newspapers.

Take that as a compliment.

Oslobodjenje is a newspaper that was founded in the middle of the Second World War and which immediately set itself up in opposition to repressive and chauvinist politics that were in the ascendant at that time.

It is a newspaper that won the admiration of the world during another war, when it championed an inclusive, democratic, multicultural ideal, in a country brutally disfigured by rampant nationalism.

Oslobodjenje’s awkward insistence on sticking to its principals has repeatedly brought it into conflict with governments and authorities. For this I salute you.

This is the 60th anniversary of your newspaper. Your past achievements are rightly being celebrated. I whole-heartedly join in this celebration, and I urge you to give equal weight to considering the next 60 years. You have a particular responsibility for the future precisely because you have such a distinguished past.

You owe it to your staff, past and present, to adapt competitive and transparent business practices, so that Oslobodjenje can guarantee the security and career development of its employees.

You owe it to your readers not to betray the reputation for political independence and high standards you won at such cost during the last war.

You owe it to all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to remain one of the pre-eminent champions of inclusive, tolerant, multicultural Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Never stop being awkward.

Thank you.