

Transcript of the press conference given by the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown at CPIC, Tito Barracks

Paddy Ashdown - The High Representative's Statement:

There is an impressive press corps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have met on previous occasions that I have been here. But I think that the dialogue that I hope to develop with my colleagues in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an essential part of the work that I want to do as the High Representative, working with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to put this country irreversibly onto the path, as stated, as a member of the European Union. So I hope we shall see lots more of each other.

I should introduce the gentleman on my left, if he is not already known to you, Julian Braithwaite, who will be not only my personal spokesman but Office of the High Representative's spokesman, responsible for co-ordinating and delivering the messages from the Office of the High Representative.

Julian Braithwaite - Chief Spokesperson for OHR:

Usually this happens the other way around and I introduce the High Representative. Thank you very much.

Paddy Ashdown

It is okay. I am well known for taking charge of these events. Julian is also going to be the person co-ordinating the general lines of communications. For those who do not know, he has experience not only here but elsewhere in the Balkans and I am delighted to say that I stole him from Mr. Tony Blair, which Mr. Blair is very unhappy about and I am delighted about.

Do you think I should do it up there? Is it easier if I do it up there for television and things?

Comment from the floor - No. (Laughter.)

Shall we vote? Those who want me to go up there, those who want me to stay here? (Laughter from the floor.)

Democracy everywhere in this place.

Well let me first of all today wholeheartedly welcome the decision reached yesterday in Belgrade to bring the Free Trade Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into force and, of course, as you know that is happening today. I suspect that regional free trade will do more to create jobs and to make prosperity in this country than all the international loans, donations, assistance programmes put together. It is a huge step forward potentially for the Bosnia and Herzegovina economy and for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and for the prospect of jobs and a normalisation of trade relationships. I think that is a really important step and I warmly welcome it.

I would like to give you my impressions of my first tour of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which commenced on Monday and finished on Wednesday night. It took in the Republika Srpska, it took in Sarajevo, of course, it took in Banja Luka, it took in Mostar, it took in Citluk, it took in Bijeljina and if the weather had not been so awful it would have taken in Brcko. But we could not quite make Brcko. I was particularly keen to go to Brcko because the work being done in Brcko to bring together the organisations to create a more effective form of government and justice is I think something of a model about how we might proceed in the future.

I will also tell you of some words I have just been delivering to the Steering Board Ambassadors, who I have just been meeting with, a few moments ago. One of the things, and it has been reflected in what I said last night in my television address, I think back almost exactly ten years to when I first came to Sarajevo, to Bosnia and Herzegovina, landing on the airfield here and hardly being able to get into the city. We made our way in eventually. I am just amazed at the extent to which things have happened here, it is very easy to get depressed, it is very easy for people to say we are not getting anywhere, we do not see any improvement and it is very easy, in particular, for the International Community. I get grumpy with, I get cross with them sometimes because it is not easy building peace after war let alone one of the most terrible wars of the last half of the last century. I know

that. I reflect how much progress we have not made in thirty years in Northern Ireland, thirty years. I remember walking in as a soldier to my own home city and watching the Catholics being burnt out of their houses in the Catholic centre of Belfast. Ethnic cleansing is not exclusive to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not one of those Catholics, not one of them has returned. A quarter of million people have returned to their houses here. Of course, we have to go further. Of course, we have a long way to go; of course, we have to go faster. But some of the things that have happened here are nothing short of little miracles. Some of them, like the stabilisation of the currency are remarkable, I think the Central Bank is one of the great success stories but we should not just think of them as large-scale things. Each one of those refugees, like the Bosniac families that I saw return to Bijeljina from which they were driven during the war. Each one of those is a little personal miracle. A miracle of personal bravery and a miracle of tolerance. When I spoke to these people they were living with their neighbours and had nothing but good words to say for the tolerance and welcome that they had received from their neighbours. Albeit that they came from — they were not personally responsible for driving them out — but albeit that they came from the community from which they were driven. And that is not just a question of Bijeljina. I was present when the Mayor of Bijeljina made what I regard to be a deeply courageous statement outside the Medzlis where there had been recently a grenade attack. In the presence of the Imam, a statement which was personally in my view, was extremely courageous and entirely in the traditions of ethnic tolerance and respect which has been the glory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia in the past. These are remarkable things. I could not imagine, I could not imagine such a statement being made in my own city of Belfast. So really I am hugely impressed at how far we have come.

I was also greatly impressed right the way across this tour. I spoke to people from all communities. Two things, first of all the genuine desire from people that I met anyway to put the past behind them and get on to build the future. And secondly, I went out of my way to meet some young people, particularly students in Banja Luka University. You know, I do not think in any university I have ever been to, and I speak as a politician, I have been campaigning in universities for twenty or thirty years in the UK, I cannot remember a university audience to whom I have spoken who were so well informed, so cogent in the arguments they put, so determined to put me on the spot and ask me tough questions and not accept other than acceptable answers that they found convincing. It was a good meeting and it was one which I think indicated how much the future of this country now lies in the hands of its youth. These are people not thinking about the past, thinking about the future and about practical things that make their lives better. That is one of the great, it seems to me, resources of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We went down to Citluk, south of Mostar to the Bobita factory there and saw one of the most modern factories, I think I have visited at any of the last twenty years in politics. It could have been a factory you would have found in the very best areas of Manchester. A Croat businessman making money, creating jobs and creating conditions for his workforce which were outstanding. Outstanding by any standards anywhere in the world, showing just how much entrepreneurship can achieve in this country if only we can find the means to unleash it. If we can strip down the bureaucratic regulations that stop people getting jobs, that stop people establishing businesses then, you know, there is an entrepreneurial spirit here ready to be unleashed that can create jobs and can create prosperity and that was an example of it, but one, I think, amongst not as many there should be — but more than we sometimes think.

I have talked about in particular the IDP's, the internally displaced people, refugees in the Bijeljina area, where I saw two Serb families, one about to return to their property and the other having regained possession of their property and about to sell it and indeed a Bosniac family who had recently returned. The first to return a year ago and by that single act of bravery had caused others to return around them.

We went to the Medzlis, as I have just said, and I saw some of the Roma families. I must say if there is anything that has left me with a deep depression and a bitter, sour taste in my mouth, it is the conditions on which in some areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina the Romas live. They are the bottom of the bottom of the pile. In this case some of the conditions in which they were living in Bijeljina are a disgrace, an absolute disgrace. The fact that they did not seem to be able to get their democratic rights adequately fulfilled in approaching the government is, in my view, a shame on those who stop them having access to the normal democratic rights that ought to be available to every citizen.

That is the good news. Here is the bad.

One thing that worries me very greatly was how many ordinary people — and, fair enough, I agree that I was speaking chiefly to refugees, IDPs who perhaps are more bitter than most — but how few now intend to vote. I am

really worried about our failure to get in particular a registration process in place in which people can register for their vote. I said to them if you do not vote you lose your chance to play your part in changing Bosnia and Herzegovina. If you believe this country needs to change, you have to give a mandate to those who want change and who want to provide reform. Most of them said to me we do not believe in our politicians any longer, we voted in the past, it has made no difference and how on earth can it make any difference now. The key thing for them is, for everybody to realise that no vote equals no change equals failure. It is absolutely crucial that people now use the time between now and 18 June to register for their vote and then use their vote. Unless we give the forces of reform, the forces of modernisation, a mandate for change this country goes on as it has done and that means it will go on moving not towards success and integration in Europe but isolation and failure.

I would like to say a few words if I may about what I said to the Steering Board Ambassadors just a moment ago. I left their meeting to come here. I told them that I was frankly impatient for the day when the International Community could normalise its presence here in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I said to them that any talk, as I sometimes hear, that the International Community will be pulling out of Bosnia and Herzegovina is completely wrong. We are not going to pull out, we are not going to leave this place. The question is not are we going; the question is what is the nature of our engagement. We can either be here, as we shall be, to prevent instability spreading or we can be here as active participants investors, partners in the process of change. That is the difference. I said in my speech the other day, the International Community is not going to go from here but the question is whether it is to contain instability or whether it is here with patience and a long-term view to take this country, to work with this country, to take it forward to bring Bosnia and Herzegovina into Europe.

In the next few years the ad hoc structures that we have created, let us remember that they are ad hoc – OHR, SFOR – should be replaced by a normal presence led by the European Union. The fact that I am double-hatted to the European Union is an indicator that that is the direction we are going. SFOR should be replaced by a more normal NATO relationship under the Partnership for Peace, with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a partner rather than a place where they have got the current kind of presence. I think that we have to force the pace of that transition from High Representative and NATO to the European Union, from a mission designed to stabilise to one which is designed to integrate and promote prosperity and jobs for all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I said to them, this may be a metaphor which I will need to explain to you, I said to the Steering Board Ambassadors and I said to my senior colleagues in the International Community that I wanted us to develop what I call a White Dot Culture. You are all far too young to remember what a white dot is, a white dot is what you saw when you turned the old televisions off. You saw a white dot and I think all of us have to have that white dot in our minds as we take our organisation — it has got important work to do for years yet, but we move that across and hand it over to the Bosnian Government — and all of us should be moving towards that so that we see the transfer of the powers that we have, capabilities that we have, over to the Bosnian Government and that Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina that works with Europe, moving towards European integration. That I think is extremely important.

Well that is longer than I would have wished to talk to you for. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for coming along. Julian, will you manage the questions?

Questions and answers:

Fedjad Forto (Federal News Agency) – Mr. Ashdown, is it possible to have peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina with major war criminals still at large, including Karadzic and Mladic?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative – It is possible to have peace because we have peace now. But I not think you can have a sustainable peace without justice, and clearly the fact that there is this unfinished business to do means that justice in relation to those who have committed these terrible crimes has not yet been delivered. So no one can be more impatient than me to see this happen. Let me say, however, that I am completely convinced of the seriousness of intent of NATO to capture these criminals. I am absolutely convinced that no stone will be left unturned to do that. I believe that there are some, including some in positions of government and positions of responsibility, who need to think seriously and hard about their responsibilities in assisting in delivering these, and it is my judgement that the capture of Messrs. Karadzic and Mladic is not a question of if, it is only a question of when. It cannot come too soon for me.

Sanel Kajan (BHTV) – My question refers to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court. What will the Court's

responsibilities be, the jurisdiction? And what problems and matters will be brought before this Court and how will it be funded?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - You mean the Bosnia and Herzegovina State Court?

Sanel Kajan (BHTV) - Yes.

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - I am going to ask for your indulgence. I know I am supposed to answer every question but I have been here about three days and I am getting myself informed about a number of issues. The establishment of the State Court is, as you will see from what I said in my speech the other day, an extremely important matter for me. It is one of those areas, however, that I have not had time to brief myself on. I hope you will forgive me that I am not going to be able to provide you with a straightforward answer now and I am not going to try to witter if I cannot provide you with that; I am not going to try to sort of say a lot but nothing. If I cannot answer the question but if you would like to ask me this question at the press conference that we hold, perhaps next week or whenever we can fix it, I will try and provide you with a substantive answer. My apologies.

Antonio Prlenda (Oslobodjenje) - Somebody told me that you said you are going to employ more local people in the Office of the High Representative. If this is true, in what positions or levels do you intend to do this?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - I would not like to exclude any position. I tell you one of my surprises when I came to the Office of the High Representative, I was just talking to some Office of the High Representative people about it yesterday, is the extent to which this has already happened in the Office of the High Representative. I have asked for some figures to be produced — I have not received those yet — about the extent to which there are Bosnians employed in the Office of the High Representative but I want to see them at every level. I asked the personnel department of the Office of the High Representative now to look into how we can apply a policy in which for every post there might be some which will be ring-fenced but for every post we should advertise locally and if there is equal quality and equal qualifications as between an international and a Bosnian there should be a presumption in favour of the Bosnian. So that is what we are now going to look at. I have asked for them to produce for me a list of those posts which might not be suitable for that and we will try to keep that as small as possible and in due course when I come back when we have sorted this out, I will come back and try and tell you what policy we have come up with. I am presented with a problem which I hope you will understand, and the problem is this that if I am not very careful I can set up an internal brain-drain, that people who ought to be serving the Bosnian institutions come to serve the Office of the High Representative because of the higher salaries. I have to think of some way that does this on a transitional basis so that these people who work within the Office of the High Representative and hopefully gain from the experience will be encouraged indeed to move on to serve Bosnian institutions afterwards. I need to make sure that I do not create that internal brain-drain. But perhaps you will think that as an example of the form of policy that I want to follow my own PA who works with me is herself a Bosnian, a post that was held by an international before. And we have recently set up a special unit that will look into reforms to the Bosnian legal codex – the code of laws in Bosnia. I do not believe that should be done by foreigners coming in here, I think the best people who know the Bosnian system of laws are Bosnians and the organisation that we have set up is, I think, we have not yet seen the full staffing list, staffed exclusively by Bosnians and headed by Zoran Pajic, himself a professor of Law who teaches at Sarajevo University, currently also teaching at the LSE. I have charged Zoran with the task of proposing amendments which we can propose to the government, to the Bosnian legal system, which will clean up the legal system of Bosnia and make it easier to catch criminals and create jobs. That I think is the first step down this track.

Merdijana Sadovic (ABC) - As you probably know, the Republika Srpska Government does not seem to be very eager to arrest war criminals. Do you intend to put more pressure on them to do so and maybe to punish them if they do not?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - I intend to put more pressure on everybody to do so, it is a legal right that we have to arrest and bring to trial war criminals and it is a legal right exercised by NATO. It is a legal right exercised by any authority and it is a breach of the law to act in such a way to prevent that success in that operation. I think we should be prepared to treat it as such if that matter can be proved.

Merdijana Sadovic (ABC) - What kind of pressure can you put on them?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - The pressure of the law.

Verica Kalajdic (FTV) – What is your comment on the announcement made by the Republika Srpska in reference to the charges against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative – I have not heard about that. Forgive me, you are ahead of me, I have not heard about that, which particular comments are you referring to?

Verica Kalajdic (FTV) – Do you know that the Republika Srpska Government announced that it would file charges against the amendments imposed by the High Representative, and did you intervene with the Federation Government concerning the replacement of the Minister of Police?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative – The two questions that you asked, let me address them in the order that you asked them. First of all I need to make absolutely clear that I fully support the Petritsch impositions, they are in my view essential for the proper conduct of the rule of law in this country. I have made that position absolutely clear to the authorities in the Republika Srpska. I support these. I believe they are legal and we shall be applying them. If people want to challenge these, then there are legal means by which they can do so and if they wish to challenge them they should use those legal procedures. In respect of the replacement of the Police Chief that you talked about, yes there is a letter, I think, in the public domain which was written by the Office of the High Representative, not in fact signed by myself, which makes it clear that if these dismissals are to be sought, then they have to be sought according to the proper procedures which were not followed in that case.

Doune Porter (UN Radio) – You mentioned at the beginning of your statement that you have become grumpy with the attitude of some members of the International Community.

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative – No, I could become grumpy. I did not say I had become grumpy.

Doune Porter (UN Radio) – Do you think that at this stage there is sufficient commitment on the part of the International Community to move forward?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative – Self-evidently no. You will expect me, it is one of my responsibilities, to argue the case as indeed I have done. In the last months before I came here, I think, I went to every major western capital, including Washington, London, Berlin, Paris, to argue the case for continued investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and indeed I got commitments from people that that would continue. I shall be pressing for more money for Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is my job and I accept that responsibility. I am a realist however; I do not believe it unreasonable for the International Community to be saying look this is a problem, which is now six years old, we have other priorities in the world. We will be shifting elsewhere. The realities, since I am a realist, the backdrop against which I have to do my job is one where inevitably the concentration on Bosnia and Herzegovina which we have enjoyed particularly in those first years will be shifting to other areas. Of course, that is the case. So what we do has to be more tightly focused, we have to focus on the priorities, we have to make sure it is more efficient, we the International Community, and what I think we do in Bosnia is to recognise, and here is the key thing which springs out of that reality. The backdrop against which we work is that time is no longer on Bosnia and Herzegovina's side. Time is no longer on Bosnia and Herzegovina's side unless we speed up the process of reform we are not going to be able to have the pace of international commitment to be able to complete that process and get Bosnia onto a sustainable path to statehood. And that is why I say we have to up the pace because if we do not the resources are likely to decline to a point where our capacity to be able to fulfil the changes we need to make will be considerably less. Let me just remind you next year, I do not know if any of you have looked at it, but next year to give you an example the debt repayment commitments of Bosnia and Herzegovina do that (*indicated an increase*) and the international aid volume does that (*indicated a decrease*) and since I came here that is the planned international aid run down. Now the gap, the debt gap, let me tell you, rescheduled debt, the debt gap is very, very big. Some might even say it is a matter of very deep concern, how we fund that. The implications for budgets of governments in this country will be very severe with knock-on consequences inevitably for people. Now the question that the new government in Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to ask and the question which I am properly asking now is can Bosnia and Herzegovina in the face of the debt crisis continue to pay KM900 for every single working age citizen in this country just for politicians and bureaucrats. Because that is what they are paying, every person of working age in Bosnia and Herzegovina today is paying three months' salary in every year just for the cost of government and bureaucrats. I do not think that Bosnia and Herzegovina can afford not to reform its systems. This country is spending far too much money on its politicians and far too little on its people. We need to reform that. We do not have an option.

Doune Porter (UN Radio) – A quick follow-up. Does that mean that your office and during your tenure in

particular, that the pace will be stepped up, that the Office of the High Representative will become much more aggressive?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - It is not a question of the Office of the High Representative stepping the pace up, it is question of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina having to step the pace of reform up and we act as facilitators. We act as people who enable that process. I am beginning to draw up contingency plans about how we deal with this debt crisis but it is an issue that the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina really has to address and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina really have to address. We stand ready as facilitators in that process but in the end this is a matter for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to address and especially for the new Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina when it is elected to address.

Aida Cerkez-Robinson (AP) - I wanted to ask you about corruption because really I understand that people pay a lot of money to politicians but corruption is really something that bugs this country terribly. Now, just in the last six years I could not see a force within Bosnia and Herzegovina that would really have the strength to break this circle, it really needs foreign intervention, simply nobody has the courage to stand up properly. Now what is your plan regarding this, your office has an anti-corruption team are you going to extend it or are you going to establish something else? Please help us get rid of this.

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - Yes to both your questions, watch this space.

Aida Cerkez-Robinson (AP) - But what are you going to do?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - All I am saying to you at this moment is watch this space. You will have to forgive me I have been here for three or four days, I have some very clear ideas about what needs to be done and we will be able to show you. First of all, I am impatient to achieve results in this but we will be able to show you first of all an organisational structure, which is designed to tackle this. When I am ready to announce that I will do so. But I am determined to reshape some of the work of the International Community here to provide a very precise focus on this task and I will let you know my ideas when they are properly consulted, when other people in the Office of the High Representative know about them and when we are ready to explain them to you. I am not in that position yet, I hope you will forgive me. The ideas I have been developing, I have been developing over two or three months but they are specific and detailed. I need to put them into practice here and I need a little more time to do that. When we have done it we will explain to you what we are going to do but you will see some change in personality, some changed structures, some capacity that focuses very tightly on this issue and some areas that I want to see early delivery on in a very precise form over the next weeks. I hope not longer than weeks.

Viola Gienger (Freelance journalist) - Two unrelated questions. One is regarding your priorities for breaking down the barriers to entrepreneurship in business in Bosnia and Herzegovina and what are your plans for tax reform? I have not seen any mention specific to that and the second question is what will be your policy in practice related to transparency of the Office of the High Representative? You specifically mentioned wanting to transfer a lot of responsibility and authority more to local institutions but in recent months some of what that meant is downplaying the role of the Office of the High Representative even when it is very integrally involved in something?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - To come to this question of the attention of the International Community necessarily moving elsewhere. That means that I have got to make better use, we have got to make better use, we the International Community, of the money and resources that we have in order to achieve the objectives that I have laid out. The idea that I am working on and the idea we are beginning to apply as you will see is that I want to move the Office of the High Representative out of doing things and into steering. Now what does that mean? It means that I have this idea that we will create a series of functional pillars. For instance there will be a pillar to deal with institution building with a specific concentration on education. I do not think the Office of the High Representative should be doing that. I think it is better done by specific international organisations more capable of the doing side of this than the Office of the High Representative. For instance UNHCR runs our RTF. We should leave them to do that, we should not interfere from the Office of the High Representative. The job of the Office of the High Representative is to set the targets and to steer the ship and to set the overall strategy. So quite deliberately, and you will see more of what you described, quite deliberately I am going to get the Office of the High Representative out of the doing bits and into the steering bits and into the monitoring bits to give overall shape to the International Community's efforts here. I think that is the right thing to do. So we will see more of what you just asked me about. I am sorry I did not note the first part of your question?

Julian Braithwaite, OHR Chief Spokesman: - Tax reform.

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - Look not all this is about tax reform, some of it is about cleaning up the law. The law itself and I described an incident in my speech about how difficult it is to establish a business. I am told and I want to check on this, that if you want to establish an illegal business, it takes you one day in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If you want to establish a legal business, it takes you one hundred days. I am told by the World Bank that although the official unemployment figure in this country is 40%, the real unemployment figure in this country is 17%. You know perfectly well where the 23% is, it is in the grey economy. Now I am not going to blame the grey economy because our rules and regulations drive good entrepreneurial businesses into the grey economy, it is the only place they can survive. Not subject to the ridiculous registration procedures, inspection procedures, etc. We have to clean up those regulations. We have to make sure it is easier to establish a business, to give jobs, to make money in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have to establish a one-stop system for business registration. We have to try and create a single economic space when it comes to the laws. When I was down in Citluk with the Bobita factory the man said: there look I have good Bosniac business friends. I have good Bosnian Serb business friends, they are very good businessmen. We could make four or five propositions to you that would enable us to expand our businesses to create more, to bring on more entrepreneurs but we have not got anybody to have a dialogue with. Nobody will take us seriously. Well I think we need to start having a dialogue with these people and look at some of these legal means of creating a single economic space in this country across the Entities and so on. Some of that will I agree devolve on taxation. I am working on some ideas on how that might be done. But until I am ready to outline those to you, if you forgive me I do not intend to do that.

Viola Gienger (Freelance journalist) - A follow up on the other question and that is, what does that mean for the kind and volume of information that the Office of the High Representative will be providing to the public about its activities and about the activities and issues that it is monitoring?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - Can you give me an example of what you mean? I am sorry it is just a little too general for me.

Viola Gienger (Freelance journalist) - If you are talking about, for example, the problems of corruption and the Office of the High Representative will be steering the ship that actually doing and that part of the onus of doing things will be on other international agencies but also on local institutions. So the question is will the Office of the High Representative though be ready to speak publicly openly about its activities

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - There are inevitably things you are carrying investigations.

Viola Gienger (Freelance journalist) - No I am not talking about investigations, I am talking about if Office of the High Representative has a particular policy related and is trying to encourage local agencies for example to take certain measures or if the Office of the High Representative is advising on a new law on something will the Office of the High Representative speak about that openly or will you be referring people mostly to other agencies?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - Well, I am a liberal. I believe in freedom of information, I believe in open government, I believe in transparency. That is one of my core beliefs. So the answer to your question I suppose is yes. If we are involved, if we are the actors in this and subject to rules of necessary confidentiality then we will try to be as open as we possibly can be. I think you better return to this question if you have a specific thing in mind in the future I invite you to do so. If there is some area you want to ask me a question about and I will try and explain what our policy is. My instinct as a liberal is to govern openly; I do not govern incidentally.

Julian Braithwaite, OHR Chief Spokesman: - We can take one more question.

Alexandra Kroeger (BBC) - You spoke about a possible replacement for SFOR. What sort of size of force and mandate and how would this tie in with the deployment of the European Union Rapid Reaction Force?

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative - Forgive me. I am looking a long way down the track. Please do not go out of this press conference and say SFOR is about to be replaced. How will Bosnia and Herzegovina look in let us say ten years time maybe sooner, who knows how fast we can move? The answer is it will look like every other country on its way to Europe, it may even be in Europe. It will have a NATO mission here, it will be part of Partnership for Peace, it will have a European mission here. I suspect amongst those democracies in Eastern Europe making their way towards Europe you will find a greater foreign presence in numbers than you find in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But what are they? They are not soldiers they are businessmen. They are embassies;

they are a NATO mission. Now, that is where we head to, that is where we are going to get to. I cannot possibly say, SFOR is here and will continue to be here for as long as it is necessary to maintain a secure space in which we develop a functioning economy, a functioning civic society and a functioning political system. As soon as that is done Bosnia becomes a perfectly normal nation, either in Europe or on its way to Europe with all those European institutions in place, but that is not about to happen tomorrow and SFOR and NATO stay here for as long as it is necessary to hold and control that space until that time arrives.