

Article by the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch: "BiH's Future is - Europe"

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When I first arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in August 1999, I was convinced (otherwise I would not have taken the job) that the Dayton Peace Agreement represented a foundation for the country's further development and that BiH could become a "normal" country. But I was aware of the continued danger of partition and I knew that the peace was still dependent on the international engagement, particularly in the form of SFOR troops.

The experience of the last three years that I treasure most is to have witnessed how the situation has improved – dramatically if I compare it to 1999! – and to be able to leave, knowing that Bosnia and Herzegovina will undoubtedly remain one state, which will eventually become a quite ordinary *European* state.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has just been accepted into the Council of Europe, which is evidence of its growing statehood, political maturity and level of democratisation. This is the result of growing *ownership* among the officials and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina — a development which is also being seen elsewhere in the region. It is also the result of policies of (Western) Europe, which has started actively to pursue the region's integration with the rest of the continent.

At the beginning of my mandate, I knew that the powers of the High Representative cut both ways. In the short term they were necessary to uproot entrenched resistance, create the framework for democracy to work and help moderate forces surface. But I knew in the long term they would work against the goal of having the country stand on its own feet. So, while robustly intervening whenever it was necessary, in particular during the first half of my mandate, I also started advocating *ownership*.

By *ownership* I mean primarily the acknowledgement of responsibility — as opposed to the kind of irresponsibility that was widespread among the leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who often pursued their own personal or party interests, did not care about the future of their country and its citizens, and expected the International Community to do their job.

This kind of irresponsibility is now on the decline. The most convincing example (of many!) is the fact that the main political parties, representing both Entities as well as the three peoples of BiH, succeeded in concluding the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement, which has established the mechanisms for the exercise of the collective rights of BiH's constituent peoples and citizens in both Entities. This perhaps seemed a relatively small and insignificant step from the point of view of the outside world, but it was a huge step in the BiH context, where ethnic division and separation dominated for so long. I believe it is the first time since Dayton that the BiH leaders managed to agree on such a sensitive and difficult issue.

Moreover, *ownership* seems to have spread to other countries in the region where leaders have begun to understand the value of negotiation and compromise. Macedonians and Albanians concluded the Ohrid Agreement last year, and in March Serbia and Montenegro found a compromise regarding their future. The twins of Balkan nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, have left the scene.

This bodes well for the future of the Balkans. I am convinced that the nationalist frenzy of the last decade belongs to the past and that officials as well as citizens in this part of the world are becoming politically mature, aware of the responsibility they carry and of their own importance as *citoyens*, the word the French use to describe the politically mature citizen who participates in public life.

At the same time, the European Union has begun to actively reach out to the Balkans, which I consider fundamentally important. The European Union failed in the 90s when it could not produce a common foreign policy and put an end to the wars in Slovenia, then Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and finally Kosovo. It was still timid during the Kosovo crisis and continued to pursue bilateral and thereby fragmented relations with all the other Balkan states.

But with the introduction in 1999 of the Stabilisation and Association Process for five Balkan states – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Albania – the EU at last made a commitment to the region. It underlined this commitment a year later when it acknowledged these countries as potential candidates for EU membership.

While Macedonia and Croatia have already signed Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the EU, which encompass closer ties, in particular in the economic field, and gradual adjustment of the legal systems to EU legislation, Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet fulfilled the 18 conditions listed in the “EU Road Map,” after which the EU will conduct a feasibility study assessing whether BiH is ready for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The “EU Road Map” requirements should have been met a year ago. They haven’t, but I am encouraged by the determination of the Alliance to finish this job before the October elections.

I am also encouraged by the decision of the European Union to take over the police mission from UNMIBH from next January and to make the next High Representative its Special Representative. The EU police mission will make Europe visible and concrete for the citizens of BiH. It demonstrates the EU’s commitment to the country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s future is clear. It can be summed up in one word: Europe. The question is not if but when BiH will join the European mainstream and eventually accede to the European Union. I do not want to create false hopes; this will take a long time. But the course has been charted, and now it is up to the leaders and citizens of BiH to see how fast they will travel along this path.

The European Union’s recent actions have persuaded me that it has a real interest in integrating the region. If the Union remains committed to this goal and Bosnia and Herzegovina makes its contribution to reaching it, the vision that I had when I came to BiH will come true. This was that my job was not to work on an exit strategy for the International Community, but on an entry strategy for BiH: BiH’s entry into Europe.