

Message from the High Representative, Carlos Westendorp, to the HDZ Congress

Let me send you my good wishes for a successful Congress.

Politicians and diplomats are fond of talking of critical junctures, of turning points, of watersheds. Sometimes such talk is exaggerated. But I believe that in the case of your Congress today, it is not.

This Congress is taking place at a critical time:

- for the future of this country;
- for the implementation of the Peace Agreement;
- and for the future of the Croat people, for which your party, and others, stand.

We face the problems of today aware of the backdrop of history. Not just recent history.

Croats have been here for 700 years. They have helped build this country. Their stamp is upon its history and its culture.

There can be no Bosnia and Herzegovina without Croats. That is your starting point; and it is mine and the international community's too.

So with that in mind, let me say to you plainly: I know that this is an difficult time for Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I understand those difficulties. I understand the HDZ's and other parties' concerns about Croats' cultural, national, and religious identity. I understand those concerns

and I am determined to address them.

But I cannot do so without Croat help. I cannot do that without Croat cooperation.

Recent events have not helped the Croat cause. What happened in Drvar was unacceptable by any standards. It tarnished the Croat name, and it tarnished the name of the HDZ. So too recent events in Stolac.

Far from creating a country fit for Croats to live in, these actions foster a climate from which many of your own people want to escape.

And what of the reluctance of the authorities in Mostar to issue the new registration document, which your people want to have so that they can travel freely? Or the donors' conference last week in Brussels, which Croat leaders did not attend? How are donors to be convinced to give their financial support to the needs of the Bosnian Croats if their representatives do not show up to make their plea? How do these actions advance the interests of Croat men and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

So I say to you frankly, not in a spirit of recrimination, but as a friend and ally of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina: cooperation is a two way street. You must help me if I am to help you.

Let this conference draw a line under recent difficulties, and set a new course. No more Drvars. No more incidents like the ones in Stolac. No more door slamming, no more obstructionism. Let us mark a new beginning for these places and for Croats in Bosnia as a whole.

Work with us to ensure that the joint institutions function properly within the Federation-real joint institutions, unencumbered by the shadow of parallel institutions alongside them.

Work with us to establish a fully functioning Cantonal Government and City Administration here in Mostar, and to make Canton 7 a model for the whole country.

Work with us to entrench the rule of law, the true test of a civilised country. Work with us to set up a really effective joint police force throughout the country, a police force dedicated to the protection of the people -all the people, all of the time.

Work with us to make the coming elections a real step forward for democracy, openness and pluralism.

In other words, work with us to implement the peace agreement. Not out of altruism. Not out of idealism. But out of a hard headed calculation of the best interests of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Because there is no future for Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina in any other course. No future under the illusory banner of Herceg Bosna. No future as a fledgling and vulnerable third entity. No future in so called cantonisation.

There is a future – a bright and prosperous future as a proud and self confident people, with close links to Croatia, but contributing to and flourishing as an integral part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is a future -but only by sticking to the spirit and the letter of the Dayton, Washington and Vienna agreements.

So let us join hands and, together, set about our work. To restore the economy, by promoting stability and good government. To attract foreign investment. To encourage tourism and business. To build this land anew.

Above all, let this conference send a clear and unambiguous message on the issue of returns. Both on Croat returns to Sarajevo, to Central Bosnia, to the Posavina area and elsewhere. And on the right of others -Bosniacs and Serbs -to

return as well, in freedom and safety.

Because the quality of life which you and your party champion for your people, the rights to which they are entitled as free citizens in a free country, these are rights which apply to all – to Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats alike. It is your duty and your honour as a party to defend the rights of your people. But you will do so most effectively, and command the respect and encouragement of the world at large, by speaking up for the rights of others also. Their rights are your rights; and your rights are their rights too. The peace agreement provides for the institutions to protect those rights; but for that to happen you have to build those institutions, and when they are completed, you must take a full part in them. You have a responsibility as an important political party to play a full part in this process, and to work towards a truly open, tolerant and democratic political environment in this country.

So I say to your party on behalf of the international community, on behalf of the thousands of men and women who have come from afar, to help this land towards peace and reconciliation, who have asked, to paraphrase the words of one American President, not what Bosnia and Herzegovina can do for them, but what they can help to do for Bosnia and Herzegovina: we stand ready to work with you in the months ahead, in good faith and goodwill. We will do our utmost to protect and advance the genuine concerns and aspirations of your people. You have an opportunity at this Congress today to move forwards, to bring closer brighter times and better days. We look to you to grasp that opportunity. If we miss this chance, history will not give us another.