

On the eve of final talks, the High Representative presses BiH's leaders for a domestic solution

The talks now underway under the auspices of the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, aimed at agreeing the optimum method of implementing the Constitutional Court's ruling on the constituency of peoples are approaching their crucial final phase.

These talks are the most significant negotiations on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina since Dayton. Time is running out, and the High Representative reiterates that the leaders of BiH have now to take responsibility for the citizens they represent and to restore dignity to the country by demonstrating that they can reach agreement.

This is truly BiH's tryst with destiny.

While admitting to substantial progress having been made during the last couple of weeks, political leaders have publicly highlighted the areas of disagreement in recent days. They say: we will not give in. To this, the High Representative has said today: "No one is being asked to give in. The leaders are being asked to find common ground – in the long-term interests of their own supporters and in the long-term interests of all the people of BiH. As a multiethnic democracy BiH can only prosper on the basis of consensus achieved by the democratically elected leadership. Without political agreement – the essence of the European democratic tradition – the people of BiH will be condemned to remain prisoners of the past."

The proposals on the table are the proposals of the parties. The role of the High Representative in these talks is to facilitate and mediate. It is also his role to ensure that the final agreement is symmetrical in substance and that it is consistent with modern European norms, as stated repeatedly by the Steering Board of the PIC. This means that the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina must, in both Entities, be fully empowered. Furthermore, their vital interests must be protected and they must be fully represented in the institutional and decision-making set-up of the Entities. The rights of the Others must also be guaranteed.

These talks must not fail. In the age of ownership and domestic responsibility every serious BiH politician will do everything possible to make sure that they succeed. On the eve of BiH's succession to the council of Europe, the politicians must live up to their obligations. Agreement on the constitutional amendments would allow them to fully focus on BiH's daunting economic situation, tackling the poverty that many suffer. The High Representative appeals to the citizens of BiH to express their support for their leaders' efforts to reach an agreement that benefits the whole country.