

Speech by the Senior Deputy High Representative, Matthias Sonn, on “Humanitarian Interventions and Crisis Management: the Lessons of the Balkan Experience” at the Annual IRIS Strategic Conference

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Avant de passer au sujet qui nous réunit aujourd’hui, je souhaiterais vous dire à quel point je me réjouis de participer à la conférence organisée par votre Institut. Six ans après la signature à Paris, non loin d’ici, de l’Accord de paix ayant mis un terme au tragique conflit ayant ensanglanté la Bosnie-Herzégovine, c’est un honneur pour moi, qui travaille à Sarajevo depuis deux ans, d’apporter à nos débats un éclairage venu de Sarajevo. Trop de souffrances furent et sont encore à déplorer pour que nous n’essayions pas, tous ensemble, de tirer les enseignements de la gestion des crises balkaniques. C’est à quoi j’entends maintenant contribuer.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Au cours des six années écoulées, la Bosnie-Herzégovine a subi une triple transition : de la guerre à la paix, du communisme à la démocratie et d’une économie administrée à une économie de marché. N’oublions pas non plus qu’à l’instar de bien des pays, y compris de l’ex-Yougoslavie, la Bosnie-Herzégovine a eu, et ce pour la première fois dans son histoire contemporaine, à se définir en tant qu’Etat indépendant. Elle a connu tout à la fois son relèvement physique, l’installation d’un cadre juridique actuel et le développement d’une approche, d’une mentalité politique et sociale moderne.

[Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last six years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has undergone a triple transition – from war to peace, from communism to democracy, from a planned economy to a market economy – and let’s not forget that like many countries, including the other countries of former Yugoslavia, it has had to define itself — for the first time in its modern history — as an independent state. It has experienced physical reconstruction and at the same time the construction of a modern legal environment and the development of a modern political and social mindset.]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If I had to sum up the lessons of this experience for humanitarian interventions and crisis management, I would say that countries cannot recover from war simply through material or military aid. They need institutions that work as well as a “culture” in which laws are properly debated, and universally applied and obeyed.

In the case of BiH, several specific factors have supported institution building. Firstly, the Dayton Peace Agreement has served as a recovery blueprint. In addition, economic and political development has been stimulated by the prospect of greater integration in European structures. The prime example of this is the Road Map which itemizes the steps that BiH must take in order to become a candidate for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. The agreement itself will bring benefits to BiH, but the steps that must be taken in order to reach this agreement – the Road Map conditions – have already produced tangible benefits for citizens, in the form of modern legislation that promotes social justice, economic efficiency and political stability.

The Europeanisation process in BiH has brought an additional advantage in that the strategic aim of bringing BiH firmly into the European mainstream has the broad support of people from every ethnic group, every part of the country and almost every political persuasion.

The lesson from this is that peace intervention can best be made sustainable when complex tasks are carried out in the context of an overarching and coherent plan which brings noticeable benefits for the population and which, ideally, is supported by external stimuli.

The conundrum of humanitarian intervention — which routinely bedevils the final phase of international relief efforts — is how to provide assistance without supplanting or weakening domestic institutions of governance. At the end of the war in BiH, when the first High Representative, Carl Bildt, began coordinating the work of the International Community, the social and political structure of the country was comprehensively devastated. Industrial production was a fraction of its pre-war level, and 60,000 NATO-led troops maintained peace. An exhausted and traumatised population and a fractious political leadership were necessarily dependent on the International Community. BiH could easily have become a protectorate – as many BiH citizens and intellectuals urged at the time. This has not happened although the IC in BiH is indeed vested with **some of** the process and authority a protectorate would have.

It has not happened because the Dayton blueprint outlines the structures that BiH needs in order to become a sovereign and democratic state. Also, by emphasising domestic responsibility, the IC has consciously and progressively sought to retreat from areas where the domestic authorities demonstrate the will and the competence to act on their own behalf. A reliable framework has been established that allows domestic leaders to develop the authority they will need as the IC reduces its day-to-day engagement.

The Dayton process is fostering a new political consciousness in BiH. This has been more time consuming and complex than physical reconstruction or straightforward political negotiation. Time is still needed for the potency of extreme nationalism to diminish; it has had to be replaced by a civic alternative, a political culture within which compromise and cooperation will be no longer viewed as weakness.

The lesson here is that it takes time to change attitudes, political mentalities. Such a change is essential – only when thinking is changed, can the need for intervention be eliminated.

There is an expression – true up to a point, and very much worth bearing in mind – that if you take care of justice, peace will look after itself. Injustice is the root of chronic instability. In the case of BiH, the displacement of more than two million people in the course of the war, often in horrific circumstances, represented an injustice of monumental proportions and one which could not be allowed to stand if the country was to have any chance of attaining long-term stability. The core of peace implementation has been to get refugees and displaced persons back to their homes.

Refugee return depends on the rule of law, primarily property law, and on the integrity of institutions, including efficient and impartial municipal administration and professional community policing. The latest statistics demonstrate that sound policy and determined practice can eliminate political and bureaucratic roadblocks. Last year, more than 92,000 minority returns were recorded, a 36 percent increase over the corresponding figure for 2000. And 2000 was itself a breakthrough year, in which the total number of minority returns – almost 68,000 – indicated a now unstoppable momentum in the process. This core Dayton obligation is on its way to being completed.

The work of modernising and strengthening the administration of BiH has involved comprehensive and complementary legal and economic reform. The judiciary is being overhauled, and a business environment is being developed which, in addition to bringing foreign capital into the country, provides benefits to citizens – better laws, less corruption, better human rights conduct, less government interference in the economy.

International investors want competent and fair courts. They also want statutory bodies free of political control. What they want to see is a functioning state that follows internationally accepted norms of conduct. In this sense the global market can act as an external stimulus, similar to the political stimulus of European integration

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Les leçons de l'intervention en Bosnie-Herzégovine comprennent la nécessité d'un plan d'action global et clair, le recours à des stimuli externes pour aboutir à des changements internes positifs, ainsi que des efforts soutenus pour promouvoir la réforme de la loi, la prise en mains par le pays de son destin et un changement des mentalités visant à substituer la confrontation et l'exclusion par la disposition et l'aptitude au compromis. Ces éléments sont liés ; leur mise en place a supposé un gros effort et un temps considérable, souvent du reste au prix d'une vive critique intérieure et internationale, mais les résultats sont à la hauteur des moyens employés, comme en témoigne la grande amélioration de la situation en Bosnie-Herzégovine lors de ces six dernières années.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.

[The lessons of intervention in BiH include the necessity of a clear and comprehensive plan of action, the use of external stimuli to effect positive internal change, and sustained efforts to promote legislative reform, domestic responsibility, and a change of the national mindset, replacing confrontation and exclusion with a willingness to compromise. These elements are interconnected; they have required enormous effort to set in place and considerable time (often in the face of severe internal and external criticism) but the results – as we have seen in the dramatic improvement of conditions in BiH over the last six years – very much justify the means.

Thank you]