

# Editorial by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch: New Year's message to BiH children

By Wolfgang Petritsch,

Harry Potter has taken the world by storm; JK Rowling's tale of a brave and affable trainee wizard has been translated into a dozen languages and has sold millions of copies around the world. The new Hollywood film is a smash hit, among adults as well as young people, and among muggles as well as wizards.

I myself, alas, am a muggle. I can't cast magic spells and I could certainly never acquit myself with any skill at the ancient game of Quidditch. However, although I'm a muggle, I can see that some of the lessons taught at Harry's school, Hogwarts, are equally valid in our more familiar everyday world. Harry has his share of problems – he comes from a long line of distinguished wizards, but his early childhood was spent living with relatives who didn't love him very much; some of his schoolmates envy him because of his singular gifts and he has to defend himself against snobs and bullies; worst of all, Harry is not always sure he can live up to the expectations which come from his famous (in wizardry circles) family name.

Life is hard and sometimes frightening – Harry knows this.

But it is also interesting and fun. Harry knows this too.

Looking ahead to the year 2002, we should take a leaf out of Harry's book. The challenges facing Bosnia and Herzegovina as we enter the new year call for a lot of energy and optimism –

two things Harry has in abundance. Young people usually have more energy and optimism than their elders. Unfortunately, though, politicians usually don't listen to people until they are old enough to vote. Older people – like muggles in general – usually ignore the wisdom of youth. But time is on your side. You will be around, making decisions, long after the present generation of political leaders have stepped aside.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has its share of problems, and so do its school – teachers are often overworked, and textbooks and amenities are often basic. But life – as Harry Potter knows only too well – is about facing up to challenges not avoiding them, it's about overcoming obstacles not just complaining about them. The future of BiH is going to be in your hands, and you can make a difference to your future by taking the initiative while still at school. At Hogwarts, Harry and Hermione and Ron outwit malignant teachers and bullying schoolmates, and they triumph over negative thinking, and prejudice and stupidity. All of those things are just as bad in the real world as they are in a book or a film.

You can't cast spells (unless, of course, you happen to be a trainee wizard) but you can still perform magic. If you can make a difference to your school – by taking steps to stop bullying and eliminate ethnic and religious prejudice – you can make a difference to your country. You don't need a broomstick – just energy and courage, and that's something which – like Harry Potter – the young people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have lots of.