

Statement by the High Representative in Lisbon

STATEMENT

by the High Representative, Carl Bildt

Lisbon, 2 December 1996

The long-term prospects for the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina can never be seen in isolation from the political and economic developments in the other countries of the region.

Our approach to peace must be wider in geographic scope than just Bosnia and longer in time than just one year. The consolidation period approved in principle in Paris and due to be discussed in further detail in London on Wednesday and Thursday is a recognition of this fact, as is the regional approach taken on an increasing number of issues.

Developments in Serbia are of great importance for the entire region. It is in the interest of the long-term stability of all of the region that there is a rapid move towards radical political and economic reform in Serbia, ending its self-imposed isolation from the rest of Europe and paving the way for a democratic society and a free economy. If Serbia is to avoid a crisis which will grow worse and worse, this is the way which Serbia and its people must go.

The recent demonstrations and protests in Belgrade and other major cities of Serbia have been as massive as they have been peaceful. The dignity in which the demands for democracy are expressed is a great testimony to the maturity of the opposition parties and their supporters.

The statements late yesterday by Belgrade authorities are genuinely alarming in that they could be read as a warning that the regime is ready to use violence to stop the democratic demands. Indeed, this is what happened in early 1991.

If the authorities were now to try and stop the protesters through violence or the threat of violence, it would dramatically increase the distance between the regime in Belgrade and the international community, and would complicate all efforts to seek a peaceful and democratic way towards the reforms so urgently needed. There is no longer any totalitarian solution to the problems of Serbia.

I am deeply worried by the situation in Serbia. The absence of any serious political and economic reforms has led to a build-up of ethnic, economic and social tension in the country which, together with the effects of the years of war, has brought Serbia to the brink of a major and serious crisis.