

Remarks by the High Representative, Ambassador Carlos Westendorp to the UN Security Council

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the end of this week, as you know, Sarajevo will host the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. This is quite the most important event in Sarajevo since the winter olympics of 1984 – and has the potential to be a watershed moment not just in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina but in the history of the entire region.

This is also, regretfully, the last time that I will address you in my capacity as High Representative, but with this important meeting in Sarajevo imminent there could be no better moment at which to bow out.

Before I update you on the events that have occurred in the last few months, I would ask that you first allow me to express my personal thoughts on the unique and challenging role I am now concluding.

First, I am grateful to have been granted the honour of acting as High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has been a formidable journey.

I arrived in Sarajevo with an almost Sisyphean task before me, but I knew there was simply no alternative to the Peace Agreement. I had no choice but to carry on the work begun by my predecessor, Carl Bildt, in an effort to steer Bosnia and Herzegovina away from the threat of war or disintegration and towards the goals enshrined in Dayton Accords.

Though I depart BiH in the knowledge that the tasks needed to accomplish this are still far from complete, I leave considerably more optimistic about its future than when I came.

When I last addressed you in May, the Kosovo crisis occupied the international community's whole attention. Inevitably it cast a shadow on the stability of the entire region. Even the most optimistic observers of the BiH scene sensed the precariousness of the International Community's efforts over the past four years to promote a lasting peace.

In BiH an ominous paralysis gripped the common institutions. Hard-liners waited on the side lines looking for any opportunity to once again fan the embers of nationalism.

However, despite our fears, our hope that BiH could withstand this test prevailed. Our efforts and hard work were rewarded. The RS remained stable, though politically inert. The Federation remained calm and restrained. BiH stood up to this test and came through. I believe it is stronger as a result.

This new strength will be further bolstered by the Stability Pact. The Stability Pact is intended to find a regional solution for the Balkans, and in many respects Bosnia and Herzegovina can usefully act as a model. To host such an important meeting of world leaders is no small achievement for the people and leaders of this country.

As I view the BiH landscape two years on, I am greatly encouraged by what I see. BiH is changing and developing. Slowly but steadily moving towards becoming a fully functional democratic State.

Whilst there has undoubtedly been progress since Dayton on many of these issues, there are areas in which implementation has been tortuously slow, with little evidence of a genuine will, particularly amongst some of the leaders, to compromise for the greater good of the State and its citizens.

Freedom of movement is a reality, thanks in part to this office's successful introduction of common car number plates. Minds are more open. The appeal of radical nationalist parties has declined.

The media are now more credible, less biased, more independent, less nationalistic. People care more about social and economic issues and less about ethnic strife. Local authorities, which for much of the period often resisted democratization and modernity, have started to cooperate properly with the International Community in its efforts to bring the country forward.

The Republika Srpska, the Bosnian Serb half of the country, stayed calm throughout Nato's Kosovo campaign. There is no better illustration that the people here are at last casting off their wartime mentality.

The resistance to democratisation evident at all levels of government and administration in BiH called for a two-fold approach. My intention was not merely to introduce superficial changes by tackling the minutiae of outstanding small-scale problems, but also to identify and instigate the reform of the country's basic institutions.

That is not to say that I could have afforded to ignore the multitude of intricate difficulties that arise in a post-war society. Indeed, in my two years as final arbiter of the Dayton Agreement and with the powers vested in me at Bonn and Madrid, I found it necessary to remove 16 high-ranking officials from their positions, including the President of the Republika Srpska, Nikola Poplasen.

I also had to impose over 45 decisions which I considered crucial to the peace process and stability of BiH – these decisions covered everything from the design of banknotes to the establishment of cantonal and municipal courts.

However, it was always clear to me that the key structures underpinning radical nationalism required swift and fundamental reform, modelled on western-style institutions, before anything approaching a real democracy could be achieved.

It was evident that a number of crucial areas had to be reformed to accomplish this: the media, the police and the judiciary. These were imperative in order to foster tolerance, undermine extremism, promote moderation and uphold the rule of law. The issue of State identity and economic recovery with the creation of a market economy were also vital elements.

First, the media. In the Balkans, political control of the media was the norm and no clearer was this exemplified than by recent event is the FRY. Only two months ago, a Belgrade Minister of Information was seriously informing journalists that there were no Kosovo refugees, only CIA-paid actors trooping around in circles for the cameras.

Disinformation was a spark, which fired the dry tinder of nationalist fervour in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Feverish rhetoric broadcast on Bosnian Serb broadcaster SRT was the reason why SFOR troops seized the transmitter towers in autumn 1997. The process of reform, which has, since been undertaken has prevented the excesses seen in the past.

As an alternative we have created internationally-sponsored media, the Open Broadcast Network and Radio Fern. OBN's news programming is now recognised as the best in the country.

The creation of these independent islands of truth in a sea of nationalist-leaning media has acted as a catalyst for the restructuring of Public Service TV, which was previously completely opposed to reform.

Last summer, I established an Independent Media Commission which, through its regulatory and disciplinary powers as well as its authority to allocate frequencies and broadcast licenses, has begun to create order in the chaotic media landscape.

Second, the police. An International Police Task Force, under the auspices of the United Nations, has made substantial progress in the democratization and professionalization of police forces on both sides of the old ceasefire line. A state border police force is under consideration, which will be a major step towards the reinforcement of this young state's identity.

Third, the judiciary. At the beginning of 1998, I instigated a review of the many initiatives undertaken by the International Community in this field. It indicated that the political nomination and removal of judges was a canker at the heart of Bosnian society, and which called out for treatment of the most radical kind.

The treatment – the establishment of mechanisms to ensure the independent selection of judges – is still ongoing; but the message that there can be no true civil society without the proper rule of law is getting through. Reforms of the legislation governing criminal jurisdiction are under way.

Fourth, state identity. In 1997, Bosnia still did not feel like its own country. Today there is a flag, a coat of arms, a national anthem, and a single series of banknotes. There is a new state district in Sarajevo, embodied by the BiH institutions building at Marijin Dvor.

I have imposed a Law on Citizenship. I have instigated telecoms reforms, establishing a single international telephone for the country. Meanwhile, in February this year I confirmed that the armed forces were commanded by the State Presidency. All this has generated in Bosnians an incipient awareness that their State, as enshrined by the Dayton Peace Accords, really exists.

Last, the economy. There is still much work to be done to create the conditions necessary to attract foreign investment, and to create a modern market economy.

A Privatisation Commission has been set up, and there have been advances in all the public utilities. The introduction of a single Bosnian currency is complete.

But the resources available to the local authorities and to the International Community are desperately scarce in comparison to the enormity of the task in hand.

This week's Stability Pact, dedicated as it is, among other things, to revitalizing the region's economy, could have a crucial effect on Bosnia's ability to trade with its neighbours.

To my successor as High Representative, the distinguished Austrian diplomat Wolfgang Petritsch, I leave a task unfinished, a glass that is still only half full.

I wish him well in what must be one of the most challenging jobs in existence. It has been a true privilege to take part in an experiment that is unique in modern times, the international stewardship and reconstruction of a post-conflict nation.

Mr. Petritsch's success in carrying reform forward will in large measure depend on how prepared the International Community is to pay for it.

Unfortunately, at the Bosnia Donors' Conference in May, only 30 per cent of the cost of implementing reforms was pledged. Moreover, in some cases – the media in particular – it is difficult for a government to justify support when there is no similar commitment from other nations.

I hope that the key issue of funding, not just for the Balkan region but for BiH specifically, will also be addressed at this week's conference.