High Representative for BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch opening speech Defence of our Future – mobile.culture.container

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Too often for my liking, I have the questionable honor of "being concerned", or "being disturbed" or I have to "condemn" or I have to "remind". Today, I have the real honor of participating at this opening ceremony of the mobile.culture.container.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Freimut Duve for his efforts to give life to the idea of culture as one of the basic elements of democratic thought and civil society.

Even more, I would like to address the people whom this project is intended to serve: the new generation of citizens in this region.

An alarming number of young people want to leave not only Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also other countries of South Eastern Europe. They aim for a better life abroad. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that 62 percent of Bosnians between the ages of 16 and 25 would leave the country if they had the chance.

"The only future, one can count upon, is waiting in an immigration bureau in Canada or Australia", the writer Miljenko Jergovic has stated, somewhat cynically. And frankly, I cannot blame him for adding, that "fear of the future rules the collective and individual sentiment of post-communist Europe" with "the Balkans being its most unfortunate part."

However, our approach to reality must not simply be a matter of describing the present. We are here, in the words of Freimut Duve, “to defend the future”.

The future is all about resisting the present fear, and breaking it. This resistance will not come from those who feed on fear, those who follow their own nationalist paranoia, dividing people and territory in a bid to retain their little fiefdoms. Breaking the circle of fear will depend upon intellectuals and artists and those who are able to look beyond borders and beyond nationalist narrow-mindedness.

And what could be more important than opening up this way of looking at the world for the next generation. This is what the mobile.culture.container is all about.

How will the Balkans thrive? Will there be tolerant societies that respect citizens’ rights? Will the countries of the Balkans in due course claim their legitimate places in the European Union – working to promote their common interests? The answer will depend on the young people of this and the neighboring countries. They will decide whether fear of the future determines how this region moves forward, or whether the Balkan countries claim their right to their own future in the family of European States.

As Miljenko Jergovic sums up so eloquently: “Knowledge about one’s own responsibility, as well as knowledge about collective responsibility for what happened after the breakup of Yugoslavia, exactly represents knowledge about the future and the incredibly hard path that has to be followed to earn this right to the future.”

I wish you every success in this remarkable effort.