

Speech by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, upon receiving the Humane Deed Award from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society Zenica

Governor Herceg, Dr Mehmedbasic; Mr Muranovic; Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a very great honor to be presented with this award but in some senses, I feel a bit of a fraud, and I certainly need to clarify who I think is receiving this! A fraud, first of all, in the light of all your work here in the Zenica municipality. During the war, you ran 40 centers, which provided food, clothes and other vital necessities to men, women and children – regardless of their background.

You now run a daily clinic treating up to 40 people a day, look after a hundreds-strong community of displaced people with no health insurance, and collect desperately needed blood, as I have seen this morning. The doctors and nurses who run this extraordinary Red Cross and Red Crescent society – indeed, yourself Mr President – give your time and your expertise for no money.

Therefore and for many other reasons it is your organization which should be picking up this award in recognition of your unstinting work through both the terrible war here and afterwards during Bosnia and Herzegovina's painful – and little publicized – road to recovery. On this World Red Cross

and Red Crescent Day, I am certain Henry Dunant would be beaming with pride at the work of the Zenica Municipal Red Cross and Red Crescent Society.

I would like to also clarify that I am accepting this award on behalf of all local and international organizations – organizations like your own – which are helping to build the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I heard that a couple of football supporters in Sarajevo concluded – in jest – that the recent win of the Zeljo football club can only have come from a High Representative's Decision. I will do all allowed by my mandate to protect and implement the Dayton Accords. But at the end of the day, a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is winning on economic reform, in returning refugees and displaced people to their homes and providing decent, law-abiding government and services for its citizens can only come from the hard work of all. No Decision of mine can magic Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union.

There are still many obstacles on the path to Bosnia and Herzegovina's return to Europe. Too many people are waiting to return to their homes. The economy remains in crisis, at the start of tough market reforms that Poland, Hungary and other countries faced a decade ago. Government is still a long way from what it should be if this country is to have the education and health services it needs, ones that will meet European standards. Equally if not more important for the leaders of this country it is to identify and deal with the root causes of the terrible incidents in Trebinje, Banja Luka and elsewhere. These were attacks at the very foundation of BiH – at democracy, freedom of religion and human rights. This must never be tolerated.

But in spite of all this, we are making progress. Against all the odds, rule of law is ensuring that people are returning to their homes. In the first two months of this year, there were about 8,000 minority returns – double the figure for January and February in 2000. The New York Times, in a recent

editorial, saw clearly what we are trying to do to ensure stability and protect the Dayton Accords, describing our action over Hercegovacka Banka as “a powerful blow for the cause of ethnic coexistence”. The newspaper said my office was “striking the right balance” in insisting on rule of law while at the same time taking on board the real concerns of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Croats, without whom this country cannot exist.

More than anything, my work here is about a focused approach to the country’s difficulties. I want to underline here my complete accord with Dr Mehmedbasic on the need to focus sharply and clearly on economic revival for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The new governments at both State and Entity level see the urgency of putting jobs and returns ahead of empty nationalist rhetoric and self-enrichment.

But we can only do so if all in Bosnia and Herzegovina take the same attitude as your remarkable organisation. I want to see the same energy put to making businesses, good schools and a system of government not corroded by corruption. This is more than just humanitarian. It is in the people’s most basic self interest to work as you do, to build a future for your children, a future in which this Red Cross and Red Crescent society will be working to aid others in crisis.

I wish you every success on this special day, which is a very special day for me, too.

Thank you for listening.