

Address of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Wolfgang Petritsch, to the Peace Implementation Council

Brussels, 23 May 2000

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies,

As we gather here today – well on the way to the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton/Paris Accords – it is time to ask:

How successful have we been in Bosnia and Herzegovina and: has it been worth the effort?

Mr. Chairman, I have been thinking long and hard about this and our role in BiH. While progress has often been incremental rather than fundamental it has been worth the effort – the people of BiH are worth the effort – peace and prosperity in the region are worth the effort.

I am personally committed to securing the increased effectiveness of the International Community's engagement in BiH. The International Community and the citizens of BiH can rest assured: I will continue to show the leadership and determination necessary to take the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina forward.

Much has been achieved since the signing of the Peace Accords. Since I took office ten months ago, we have focused on key priorities to advance the peace process in strategic areas.

What has satisfied me most is that we now see things unthinkable at the outset of this process: there are evictions of illegal occupants in Bijeljina – a place of horrible “ethnic cleansing” in the early days of the war in BiH – and returns to Foca, until recently only known for being a preferred “resort” of indicted war criminals. Never let it be said that we have not shown the determination and commitment to returns.

Significant progress has been made in building a free media, serving the citizens of BiH and their right to know. More is to come.

Let me make clear at this point that I am determined not only to lead BiH forward but also to defend the progress we have made so far. Those obstructionists who think they can intimidate and threaten at will and with impunity, both inside and outside of BiH – think again. Those who stand against returns and those who threaten journalists in their quest to inform the public will face the full force of my mandate and the law. We will not bow to those who wish to extinguish the torch of hope that is carried by the brave journalists, prosecutors, judges, human rights activists and others either in BiH or elsewhere in the region. These people – whose efforts I thoroughly support – stand at the vanguard of a new civil society. I am fully aware that this civil society is still in its infancy – but it is critical not only for BiH but for all the countries of the region.

Mr. Chairman, the citizens can change the realities in a country, this has been proven in Croatia: this country leads the way to a new civil society in the region. I have sought to use this window of opportunity – and I am encouraged by the new perspectives this has brought for regional returns, neighbourly co-operation, respect for the integrity of BiH's borders and the new dynamics within the Croat community in BiH. All this, I hope, will create new facts on the ground and bring an end to the illegal parallel institutions that have prevented so much meaningful co-operation in particular in the Federation.

The time has finally arrived for the political and civic leaders of BiH to show real commitment to the Peace Agreement – simply to fulfil their obligations. So far they have failed to do so in many instances. I have been tough on the BiH leadership – as the ones present here know. I will continue to do so until they – until you, the leaders of BiH – deliver.

Leading Bosnia and Herzegovina into a better future requires shared responsibility, accountability and the will to work together. Without that, the desire of BiH to join European and international institutions, such as the Council of Europe or indeed the European Union, is meaningless. Membership in all these institutions requires the ability to

work and function within these institutions and to come to a common position and shared standards within the country.

Mr. Chairman, it is imperative that Bosnia and Herzegovina has an effective and working Council of Ministers. It has taken the BiH Presidency an inordinate amount of time to nominate a candidate for the Chair of the Council of Ministers – in effect the Prime Minister of the Country. They have just done so – only yesterday. Until the Council of Ministers is fully established, both the Presidency and Parliament have not fulfilled their duty.

The failure of the State Parliament to adopt an Election Law is yet another example of the lack of political will to move forward for the good of the people.

Officials at all levels need to set themselves — higher standards. Take the parliamentarians for example – I often think they have very little comprehension of what it means to serve the people – what it means to be responsible law makers. How can the adoption of 10-15 laws in a two-year mandate ever be satisfactory? It is not.

The time has come for the politicians to begin serving the Bosnian people's interests. My first message – to the Bosnian leaders – is:

“The people are not supposed to serve you – it is your duty to serve the people”.

And my second message – to the people of BiH – is:

“Vote, and vote for change”.

The time of the tired, old wartime politicians and parties has passed.

The war is over. It has to stop in the hearts and minds as well.

Now is the time for new leaders, leaders who can reconcile BiH with itself and who can integrate BiH into Europe.

I continue to believe that we can succeed. Today we will set out our priorities – our three key strategic areas:

- Deepening economic reform and creating the conditions for self-sustaining market-driven economic growth to avoid an economic crisis as BiH makes the transition from a donor dependent economy.
- Second: Accelerating return of displaced persons and refugees — with a particular emphasis on enabling citizens to exercise their property rights.
- And thirdly: Fostering functional and democratically accountable common institutions, supported by an effective, merit-based civil service and sound financial basis, based on the Rule of Law.

Combined with enhanced international co-ordination — and I would like to particularly thank all present representatives of our implementation partners for their support –, they will set the stage for success, despite the obstacles that have been put in our way by obstructionist political forces.

We also need to consolidate institutions – to ensure they are functioning, effective and properly financed by domestic and independent revenue sources. Consolidated institutions are critical for long term stability and prosperity.

The Common institutions remain the central focus of these efforts to build the State of BiH. Of course, and I have said this before, we are not in BiH to build a perfect state, nor should we – this is for the Bosnians to aspire to. What we are here to do is to oversee the establishment of a basic framework for a functioning state – allowing for a dynamic civil society and a vibrant market economy.

We have entered a stage of the peace process where donor support for BiH is declining significantly and rapidly as it has been already stated here. I consider one of my most important tasks in the coming period to ensure that the increasingly scarce resources of the IC are effectively spent. I believe that the remaining international resources should now be directed towards building the necessary institutional framework to allow for private investment, both domestic and foreign.

But let us be realistic, once again: it is not yet attractive to invest in BiH. Vestiges of the old system need to be replaced by modern institutions. We, the International Community, have to support the building of the essential prerequisites of economic growth – we need modern legislation, deregulation, a viable banking system, transparent privatisation, investment protection by making the Rule of Law a reality. Yesterday I imposed a decision to strengthen the entity banking agencies – we just cannot lose more time.

Now we need to focus even more on capacity-building: modernising the judiciary – we need strong and independent courts in BiH –, training police and border service personnel, supporting key legislation projects, building a professional merit-based civil service, in particular on the state level.

It is essential that the International Community also maintain its commitment to security as a prerequisite of civilian implementation. The strong and undiluted presence of SFOR remains critical for security and stability in BiH through, in particular, support for the return of DPs and refugees, support in combating corruption and organised crime and support to ICTY.

We cannot afford to step backward in BiH – this would have repercussions for the whole region. BiH is central to the region and the region is central to Europe and its future. Let me repeat: rather than talking about an exit strategy, what we really need is an entry strategy for BiH into Europe – and we are already fully engaged in this.

Mr. Chairman, I stand ready to assist the citizens of BiH to move forward — toward a better future. I will not hesitate to use my powers to the full and take decisive action against all forms of obstruction to free the citizens of BiH so that they can fulfil their potential. Yesterday again I had to remove three officials for their obstructionist actions. Those who have followed my work in BiH will know: I am ready to listen – but I do mean business.

Opportunities to progress – be they EU Stabilisation and Association Process, Council of Europe membership or taking advantage of the Stability Pact – are there for BiH.

Members of the Council, with your support, I am determined to help the citizens of BiH to seize these opportunities – but let me be very clear:

- I have always reached out to both the leaders and the people of BiH to help this country to move forward.
- But I am also fully prepared to help the citizens of BiH realise their rights against all those leaders who do not act in the interest of their people.

Most importantly- and here I echo Commissioner Patten's speech -, the people of BiH must take Ownership and responsibility for their own country. I am convinced they have all it takes – they can do it. But if they fail to face up to this challenge, Bosnia and Herzegovina will descend into years of economic stagnation and social and political unrest. I believe the citizens of BiH can heal their wounds, embrace tolerance and move forward into the new millennium. It is time for the Bosnians and Herzegovinians to remember:

“Ko će pomoći ako necemo jednim drugim” – “Who will help us if we don't help each other”?

Thank you.