

Article by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch: "What kinds of leaders Bosnia and Herzegovina needs, Removing Obstacles to Ownership"

My consistent message to this country has been that of "Ownership" – that officials and citizens alike take on the role of building the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those officials who put their personal, national or party interests before their professional obligation to serve this country and its citizens, are serious obstacles on the road to reconciliation, to prosperity or to the inclusion of BiH in the European family of states.

Four years after Dayton, many of the forces who divided this country still remain in place. With their corrupting presence, those who wish progress find they are prevented or even threatened from abandoning parochial hatreds and shady practices. Ambassador Barry and I concluded that ownership could not take root with obstructionists still in positions of authority. It was with regret that we concluded we had no alternative but to remove 22 officials from their posts on Monday.

Within hours of these dismissals, both my office and the OSCE began receiving phone calls, letters and telegrams of thanks from ordinary citizens of BiH. Throughout the country, people tell us that they want their rights protected and officials that fulfil their duties. They understand that a Minister of Justice should not interfere with decisions of the Court to

suit his political agenda. Or that a Minister of the Interior should not refuse to suspend a police officer convicted of assault. Or that citizens should not be prevented from returning to their original homes by a mayor who refuses to establish a municipal housing office, or by a housing official who rejects one claim after the other, in open violation of property and housing laws.

Ordinary citizens have heard the message of the International Community that assistance and investment will not be provided to municipalities governed in an anti-Dayton manner. They know that donors are reducing their level of aid to BiH. Municipalities that have been left out due to the non-compliance of their leaders might never receive the aid and investment needed to create jobs and ensure economic development – unless their leaderships open up to progress and the future.

You and your country need leaders that have your interests at heart; who abide by and enforce the law; who implement the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement. You need such leaders not only so that you can get a job, experience justice from the courts, are protected by professional police, can return and repossess your apartments and property. You also need such politicians so Bosnia and Herzegovina can join Europe, which is waiting to embrace it.

The principles advocated by the International Community for BiH are the basis for membership in Europe, of which the Council of Europe is the first step. There is no reason why – if officials and citizens alike take ownership for the future of this country – that BiH cannot be a true European partner.

I believe in this country and its people. I am confident that the citizens of BiH will hold this country's most senior leaders to their commitment in the New York Declaration that "anti-Dayton forces advocating ethnic hatred and division have no place in the politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina." It is

high time for real change in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Where Ambassador Barry and I were able to identify and prove specific and obstacles blocking this country's future, we have done our part. Now it is up to you.