

Article by the High Representative, Carlos Westendorp: "Lessons From Bosnia"

SARAJEVO — This is my last week as the international community's High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a post I have held for the last two years. As this article goes to press, gangs of workmen are hastily planting flower beds and filling in the potholes of the war-damaged approach roads to Sarajevo's Zetra sports complex, the venue for the 28-nation Stability Pact summit tomorrow.

Zetra is the only place here large enough to hold such a conference, the most significant international gathering to happen in Sarajevo since the 1984 Winter Olympics, which Zetra was in fact built to host. The tragedy to which this city was subjected this decade is grimly represented by the rows of graves on what used to be a football pitch outside the complex. The symbolism of this will surely not be lost on the thousands of delegates already descending on the city. Those delegates will be able to see for themselves what we have achieved here. The Stability Pact is intended to find a regional solution for the Balkans, and in many respects Bosnia can act as a model.

I am leaving Sarajevo full of optimism for the country's future, even though my task here is still far from complete. Bosnia-Herzegovina has changed dramatically since 1997. Freedom of movement is a reality, thanks in part to this office's successful introduction of common car number plates for all areas and ethnicities. Minds are more open. The appeal of radical nationalist parties has declined, to the benefit of idea-driven, non-nationalist parties.

The media is now more credible and independent, and less biased and nationalistic. People care more about social and economic issues than 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. That is the best evidence that the people here are at last casting off their wartime mentality.

Other changes include the crucial issue of refugee return. With international assistance, people are coming back to their pre-war homes in significantly greater numbers than were registered during the same period last year. In one Bosnian Serb area, local policemen have paid regular visits to a small community of Bosnian Muslims who have recently returned. In the past, such visits would have been for one purpose only: to terrorize them. But these policemen were simply checking on their welfare.

When I took over from my predecessor, Carl Bildt, I quickly perceived the danger of getting lost in the day-to-day minutiae of peace implementation. This was why I pledged to identify the institutions that underpinned radical nationalism, and to transform them into the kind of institutions that exist in Western-style democracies. That is not to say that I ignored the minutiae. To have done so would have been irresponsible, since resistance to democratization can be seen (and will continue to be seen) at all levels of government and administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In my two years, I have been forced to remove 16 high-ranking officials from their positions, including the president of the Republika Srpska, Nikola Poplasen. As the ultimate interpreter of the Dayton Peace Accord, I also have imposed over 45 decisions and laws on the country, on everything from the design of banknotes to the establishment of the courts. Here are some more concrete examples of what we have achieved:

- The media. In the Balkans, political control of the media is endemic. One only has to look at recent events in Yugoslavia for an example. Just 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. It was this kind of disinformation that helped spark the war in Bosnia. In the autumn of 1997, SFOR troops seized the transmitters of the Bosnian Serb broadcaster SRT. SRT has since been restructured. Meanwhile, we have created internationally-sponsored alternative media, like Radio Fern and the Open Broadcast Network, whose news programming is now recognized as the best in the country. And last summer, I established an Independent Media Commission which, through its regulatory and disciplinary powers, has enabled the international community to limit the influence of Croatia

over the Bosnian Croats in Herzegovina.

- 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 cease-fire line. A state border police force is under consideration, which will be a major step forward in reinforcing this young state's identity.
- The judiciary. A review I instigated at the beginning of 1998 indicated that the political nomination and removal of judges was a cancer at the heart of Bosnian society, which called out for treatment of the most radical kind. The treatment, the establishment 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.
- 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. I have imposed a law on citizenship. I have instigated telecoms reforms, establishing a single international telephone system for the country. Meanwhile, in February this year, I confirmed that the armed forces were commanded by the state presidency, not the regional governments. All this has given Bosnians an incipient awareness that their state, as enshrined by the Dayton Peace Accord, really exists.
- The economy. There is still much work to be done to create the conditions necessary to attract foreign investment and create a modern market economy. A privatization commission has been set up. There have been advances in streamlining the public utilities, and some steps toward privatization. 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.

To my successor as High Representative, the distinguished Austrian diplomat Wolfgang Petritsch, I leave a task unfinished. I wish him well in what must be one of the most challenging jobs in existence. Mr. Petritsch's success in carrying reform forward will partly depend on how prepared the international community is to pay for it.

Unfortunately, at the Bosnia donors' conference in May, only 30% of the estimated cost of implementing the planned reforms was pledged. I hope that the key issue of funding, not just for the Balkan region but for Bosnia specifically, will also be addressed at this week's conference. Unlike the cracks in Zetra's walls, the deficiencies of the monetary pledges so far cannot be hidden.