

Article by the High Representative, Carl Bildt: "Response to Dr Henry Kissinger's article in the Washington Post of 8 September entitled – In the Eye of a Hurricane"

While Henry Kissinger – "America in the Eye of a Hurricane" – is strong on analysis of the basic dilemmas of Bosnian peacemaking, as well as on how we ended up where we are, he is notably short on policies that could be a credible alternative to the present path. In fact, I believe the policies he advocates are an almost certain recipe for a new war.

The crisis in Bosnia was undoubtedly a crisis for which the failures of Western policy bears a heavy responsibility.

Had there been a well co-ordinated international attempt to negotiate a proper power-sharing arrangement between the three communities of Bosnia during the latter part of 1991 or early 1992 – when the break-up of Yugoslavia in a storm of nationalist emotions showed the strength of ethnic divisions – there would have been at least an outside chance of avoiding the war.

Instead, we saw how the arrangements which just might have worked were turned down as being not good enough, and in spite of the absence of agreements inside the country the international community rushed forwards towards a recognition which triggered the most bitter and brutal war we have seen on the continent of Europe since 1945.

And the years of war which followed repeated the same pattern. Settlements which might have been possible – notably in 1993 – were turned down as not good enough. The ethnic cleansing was left to continue in the country while moral standards were upheld in the outside world.

The [Peace Agreement](#) of Dayton is far from perfect. Those of us who spent three weeks at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base last autumn are probably those most aware of its ambiguities, contradictions and problems. But it did end the war, and it did initiate a political process in the country and in the region which has brought at least the hope of stability and peaceful development.

We will have to struggle for a long time to come in order to make its complicated political provisions work. It is the by far most ambitious peace agreement in modern history. The elections now – imperfect as they are – are crucial in paving the way for the setting of common institutions of the country, although the Bosnia of the two entities will probably be the most decentralised state in the world. And later this autumn there will be the even more complex and at least as important elections for the local Councils throughout the country. For this to have a chance to succeed, there will have to be a solid international presence in the country during the consolidation period leading up to the next set of national elections in September 1998.

For all the difficulties we are bound to face in this process, the alternative route suggested by Dr. Kissinger would be far more dangerous and difficult. Following the pattern of the past, the imperfect agreement we have would be scuttled for something as yet undefined, and we would once again be on a path of uncertainty which in all likelihood would give us a new conflict.

The result of a “plebiscite in each ethnic region on the simple choice between a multiethnic Bosnia and some form of

partition" would be easy to predict. The Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats would vote for their ethnic statelets, and the Bosnian Muslims would vote for a multiethnic country although their genuine commitment to it would be open to doubt.

And if there was even the slightest hint of a possibility of the international community recognising a break-up of the country there would be new waves of ethnic cleansing and horrors, not least in Central Bosnia in order to "clean up" the map. All hope for the return of the refugees and displaced persons would be lost. The creation of the NATO-guaranteed separate Muslim entity advocated by Dr. Kissinger would not be able to prevent anything of this.

Living together is not always easy. The concept of the "melting pot" is under challenge also within our own societies. But to give up and give in to the ethnic fears and divisions which are there would be to pave the way for endless conflicts and confrontation. In Bosnia we are not only confronted with all the complexities of European history – we are also confronted with our own future.

The divisions of Bosnia can not be seen in isolation from the problems of the surrounding parts of South-eastern Europe. I need only mention Kosovo, Vojvodina, Eastern Slavonia or Macedonia to be clear. I believe it is only through a policy of integration throughout this region that we create the conditions for Bosnia to work and prevent similar tensions from exploding into open conflicts elsewhere. It is integration – not separation – which must be our strategy for the future.

The weeks and months to come will be difficult. There must be arrangements for genuine power-sharing between the elected representatives of the two entities and the three constituent peoples of Bosnia if the dangerous drift towards acceptance of the partition brought by war is to be halted and reversed. And this will not happen without a strong international

involvement.

Dayton certainly has its faults and its flaws – but it is the agreement which we have. The civil war which Dr. Kissinger fears will come not from sticking with the Peace Agreement, but from giving it up before it was given a chance.