

Article by the High Representative, Carl Bildt: "The Important Lessons of Bosnia"

The vision of Dayton – that of a common, multiethnic state – can be realised. But that will require both the will of the Bosnian people themselves, and a seriously renewed commitment from us in the international community.

The difficulties we are facing now are primarily the responsibility of the political leaders on all sides in Bosnia. But we must not neglect the important role we can play ourselves, if we offer the carrots, and if we are willing to use sticks.

As far as the biggest stick is concerned, the strictly military aspects of implementation have gone well, indeed better than we could have expected. With an overwhelming show of NATO force, the International Forces in Bosnia (IFOR) has faced few challenges that it could not easily master. Thanks to the professionalism of Adm Leighton Smith and the many international troops (29.000 from European Union countries, 18.000 from the United States, about 10.000 from non-NATO members including Russia) under his command, it has been a NATO operation as unique as it has been successful.

But as we look ahead, the onus will clearly shift to the civilian agenda. There the signs are more troubling.

If the international forces are to leave according to plan at the end of the year, as they should, and if the people of Bosnia are to forge a common prosperous future – as they must – certain things will have to happen:

1. The parties must implement all of the provisions of Dayton. They are each in a situation of non-compliance in certain clearly defined areas, notably prisoner release, the departure of foreign forces and co-operation with the International War Crimes Tribunal, including most notably the cases of Radovan Karadzic and Gen. Ratko Mladic. There can be no compromise on these questions.
2. The international community must deliver on the economic aid we talked about at the Brussels conference last December. There is currently a shortfall of about a third of the 1.2 billion USD emergency loan program designed by the World Bank and the European Union. If we cannot hit the targets for Bosnia's short-term needs, I see little prospect of delivering on the much more ambitious programs to secure her long-term future.
3. We are moving toward elections later in the year that will provide the opportunity for Bosnia to make clear its democratic vocation. We must assist this process with funding, which is still short, and with expertise. The politicians in Bosnia on both sides of the divide, must start to talk the language of peace rather than employing the rhetoric of war.

There is bound to be a temptation for politicians to play to the fears and insecurities of their communities, rather than raising their eyes to the more generous dream of a Bosnia confident and united. But if they want to break the cycle of violence, the politicians must take their own risks for peace.

The role of the media will loom increasingly large in this crucial period. My office will work closely with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which is charged with monitoring the elections, to ensure that all parties are given reasonable access to the media, and that decent journalistic standards are maintained. For instance, we are working up a set of regulations to apply to the government in their relations with the media and we are encouraging external financial assistance to independent media within Bosnia. The collapse of Yugoslavia into ethnic conflict and even hysteria had a lot to do with dishonesty and manipulation in the local media. They must now play their part in consolidating the peace.

4. From the diplomatic side, we must not let too many actors crowd the stage. It is good that we hold periodic meetings to hold the parties to their obligations. But they are past masters at playing international mediators off against each other. That was our experience through the war, and I have seen this tendency regularly in Sarajevo and Mostar in the past months. We must continue to show a united front.

5. Finally, we must not lose sight of our aim, which is a united, tolerant, multiethnic Bosnia. For those on the outside that means we should not flirt with suggestions that partition would provide an easy way out. From within, it means that the priority must be reconciliation. All else flows from that.

The parties must know that the eyes of the world are on them. Bosnia today is one of the most bitterly divided societies there has ever been, and its task in achieving reconciliation will be immense.

But if the struggle for peace is worth the effort, and better than the alternative which is more war, Bosnia will continue to need all the attention and support it can get if its is to complete its journey back into the civilised world.