Article by the High Representative, Carl Bildt:”Keeping Bosnia in One Peace. The Military Mission is going Well; It’s the Civilian Reforms That Need Help”

When I saw Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Europe last week, he and I discussed with the leaders from the region whether the political side of the Bosnia peace process was just frozen, or whether it had already broken down irretrievably. I am personally sure that 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. The formal structures of civilian implementation – committees, commissions and human rights chambers – are being set up according to Dayton. But we must look at the larger and more disquieting picture. By itself the military can do little more than silence the guns and partition the country. The civilian structures we set up will be empty shells if they are not filled with the active determination of the former enemies to build a lasting peace.

There was little evidence of this political will during the transfer last month of the Serb-occupied suburbs of Sarajevo to the Muslim-Croat federation. Many of the Serbs who wanted to stay in their homes were terrorised first by other Serbs and then by some of the returning Bosnian Muslims. The unification of the city was good to the extent that we are unlikely to see shells and snipers´ bullets raining down from the hills on the people in the centre. But not enough was done by the two leaderships to persuade the Serbs that they had a secure future in the city. There was a campaign of intimidation by hard-liners on the Serb side, but also a lack of statesmanship on the Bosnian government side in their failure to reassure anxious residents that they would be welcome as citizens of the federation.

Sadly, the pattern of events in Sarajevo is being repeated around Bosnia. Whether in Mostar or Banja Luka, Bugojno or Stolac the situation on the ground is not encouraging. The forces for ethnic separation are at present proving stronger than the forces of national re-integration. This carries the risk of defeat for the international community in our efforts to consolidate the achievements of the Dayton agreement. But more importantly, the drift of events represents a real threat

to the interests of all the people of Bosnia, whatever their ethnic or religious identity.

Quite concretely, if Serbs flee Sarajevo because they fear they will not get a fair deal from the federation government, the chances of Bosnian Muslims returning securely and contentedly to their homes in eastern Bosnia will be reduced. Similarly, the future of Sarajevo itself, where Bosnians, Serbs and Croats have lived peacefully together throughout the years of the siege, will be bitter if the polarisation between communities continues elsewhere. I do not believe we are witnessing a countdown to the renewal of war. But we might be seeing a failure to capitalise on the possibilities for peace, which could lead to partition.

So what is to be done? The international community is not falling asleep on the job. In Moscow last weekend, the international Contact Group met leaders from the region and put across a very forceful message. Unless the remaining prisoners of war on all sides are released, the conference we are planning next month in Brussels to raise money for economic reconstruction will not take place.

But if we are capable of waving a stick, we also need the carrots. There has to be a visible peace dividend for people to believe that it will not be worth going back to war. We in the international community, whether directly or through the international financial institutions, have the means to jump-start the local economy and keep the armies of soldiers from being recycled into armies of unemployed: But I accept that it is always easier for foreign ministers to promise help than for finance ministers to sign the check.

In sum, if IFOR is to leave according to plan at the end of the year – as it should – and the people of Bosnia are to forge a common prosperous future – as they must – certain things will have to happen:

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.

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.

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.

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. And finally, we must not lose sight of our aim, which is a united, tolerant, multi-ethnic 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. It took a long time for the United State to emerge healed from horrors of the Civil War. 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.