

Article by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch: "Bring the War Criminals to Book"

The West's high representative in Bosnia says tough conditions must accompany aid to Balkans.

SARAJEVO – The international community must remain engaged with the former Yugoslav states if it wants them to stop fighting among themselves and become prosperous European partners. But it must also back each dollar in aid with tough conditions.

Those who will gather today in Zagreb for a summit of European Union and Balkan leaders should emphasize certain principles as they set the agenda for long-awaited change in southeastern Europe. One is that there should be no further redrawing of borders. Another is that war criminals must be brought to justice.

Much progress has been made. The two neighboring countries largely responsible for fuelling the ethnic divisions in Bosnia have changed dramatically. In Yugoslavia, the security headache represented by indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic disappeared when Serbians took to the streets last month to oust him after it became apparent that this opponent, Vojislav Kostunica, was the public's choice. Nearby, Croatians in January voted in a government that was committed to democratic change, to bringing war criminals to trial and to economic reform. President Stipe Mesic has made it clear that the country no longer hungers for chunks of Bosnia as did his predecessor, Franjo Tudjman.

Cynical and Bloody

Both Milosevic and Tudjman thought that by signing the Dayton peace accords five years ago they could pursue their cynical and bloody agenda of trying to carve up Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dayton has proved stronger than they were.

Would-be map-makers remain, however. Some have spoken of a need to compensate Yugoslavia for the "inevitable" loss of Kosovo, where the ethnic Albanian majority want independence. With a dash of red pencil, they argue, Yugoslavia could be rewarded instead with Republika Srpska, the Serb-dominated half of Bosnia.

This would only guarantee more bloodshed. The wish-list of nationalist politicians in the Balkans can never be satisfied. They are also diametrically opposed to European integration.

For the new Yugoslav president the surest way for Yugoslavia to retain Kosovo – a right enshrined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 – is to establish diplomatic relations with Bosnia. Mr. Kostunica visited the Bosnian capital Sarajevo shortly after taking office, and now diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Bosnia look set to be established soon.

These sea-changes in the region should mean that suspected war criminals have fewer places to hide. Aid to the former Yugoslavia must be strictly conditional on each country's cooperation with the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague. The detention of individuals like Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serbs' wartime leader, and his military sidekick, Gen. Ratko Mladic, is long overdue. Their continued presence in the former Yugoslavia, despite being wanted by the crimes tribunal on charges of genocide, strengthens the morale of extremist nationalist politicians and anchors the region in the past.

"Ethnic cleansing eradicates the accusing truth of the past," says writer and commentator Michael Ignatieff. "In its wake, the past may be rewritten so that no record of the victim's presence is allowed to remain."

But those who would falsify the past in Bosnia are failing. The local authorities in Banja Luka will make certain that the Ferhadija Mosque, a 16th Century place of worship that was leveled by Serb forces during the war, will be rebuilt. Last month I ensured a monument will be built to commemorate the thousands of victims of Srebrenica, the worst massacre in Europe since World War II. The site of the cemetery is next to the main road into the town in eastern Bosnia. All who enter the town will know what happened on those evil July days of 1995.

The most lasting monument to the victims of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be faster refugee

returns and a sustained economic revival. The number of “registered minority returns” this year – that is refugees who return to areas where they are now an ethnic minority – nearly doubled in the period January to September, to 37,000 compared to the same period in 1999.

Refugee returns to hard-line Serb areas in eastern Bosnia were considered impossible only last year. But at the end of this week, 50 Bosnian Muslim families will return to their homes in the town of Foca, where Serb paramilitaries ran horrific rape camps.

Bosnia needs deep-rooted economic reform if it is to compete with Croatia and Yugoslavia for declining international aid. I am pushing the same trade and integration policies that tied together implacable foes in post-war Europe, much as French foreign minister Robert Schuman, one of the EU’s founding fathers, did with the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s.

Croatian kunas and Yugoslav dinars have been ditched in favor of Bosnia’s own “single currency,” the convertible mark. The Office of the High Representative is to auction mobile telephone licenses that will see companies compete on price-not on a subscriber’s ethnic origins. The auction will also snatch an important cash-cow from the grip of the three hard-line nationalist groups, the real reason why these parties want to hold onto power.

Frustratingly Slow

General elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina earlier this month reinforced the steady, if frustratingly slow, decline of hard-line nationalist parties in Bosnia. The Bosnian Muslim nationalist SDA party polled around 27 % of votes earlier this month compared to the SDA-led coalition which polled 49 % in 1998. Only the Serb nationalist SDS party has maintained its strength.

But let’s be frank, given the expectations raised by the changes in Croatia and Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina’s election results failed to dazzle.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt told Depression-hit America that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” I believe the same is true in Bosnia. Hard-line nationalist politicians in Bosnia, worried by the evidence that people here care more about jobs than hazily defined “national interests,” played shamelessly on old fears to hold onto power and what is left of the moribund Communist-era economy.

The international community cannot vote in the place of Bosnia’s citizens. But politicians of every stripe in Bosnia should know they must work within the clear framework set by the Dayton accords and the precedents set by their subsequent implementation.

The rhetoric of fear puts a politician on a collision course with the international community. I won’t hesitate to use my sweeping powers to remove any leader from a position of public trust if they oppose Dayton implementation. The international community still has a dog in this fight. To give it up now, as the first fruits of Dayton start to appear, would leave a black hole in European regional security that none of us can afford.

Mr. Petritsch is the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, in charge of the civilian implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords.