

Article by Paddy Ashdown, High Representative for BiH: “Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Agenda for 2005”

The immediate policy objective for Bosnia and Herzegovina is very clear – to get through the twin gates that lead to Partnership for Peace and the start of Stabilisation and Association negotiations with the European Union.

This will lock BiH into the Euro-Atlantic integration process – and will start producing the tangible benefits, in terms of security and prosperity, that this process can deliver.

PfP and Cooperation with ICTY

But of course, there are things that must be done before the objectives can be reached. The first is to demonstrate full cooperation with the ICTY. Non-cooperation currently represents the primary obstacle to BiH securing either of its main policy objectives.

The NATO Foreign Ministers will meet in Brussels later this week. It seems likely that they will not invite Bosnia and Herzegovina to join Partnership for Peace.

Why?

Inadequate cooperation with the ICTY.

Six months ago NATO warned that the Republika Srpska authorities' failure to live up to their obligations to cooperate fully with the ICTY, including the arrest and transfer of war crimes indictees, breached a fundamental requirement for accession to PfP. NATO also noted that

“systemic changes (are) necessary to develop effective security and law enforcement” in BiH.

In order to move forward, these systemic changes will have to be made.

It is clear that too many RS officials have for too long been acting in bad faith with regard to this issue. All of us have now seen Ratko Mladic’s personnel file. Till two years ago he was an employee of the VRS. The RS authorities can hardly be surprised when they are held to account for this.

The RS Police have been similarly compromised. Recently, a tip off from the local police in Foca helped Gojko Jankovic, indicted by the ICTY, to evade arrest.

The police are not doing their job – in fact they are in some cases doing the exact opposite of their job, helping wanted individuals escape justice rather than helping to apprehend these individuals.

No one can argue that this situation benefits citizens. It doesn’t. It harms citizens, in the RS and throughout BiH.

It benefits a few – the few who have always benefited while the rest of the population are obliged to contend with poverty, crime, corruption and exclusion from the European future that is their birthright.

That must now stop.

Very soon, the Police Restructuring Commission will submit its report. A positive outcome in police restructuring will require the establishment of a single policing structure in BiH.

EU Integration

In its bid to start negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, BiH is making

significant progress, but we will have to step up the pace considerably as we move into the New Year.

To do this the Council of Ministers is going to have to meet more regularly. There is a huge amount of work to be done, and to do it the government has to focus its energies. The authorities have a clear plan of action, and this is commendable, but the deadlines in this plan are slipping. This must be addressed.

The customs services are in the process of being merged and will be administered by the Indirect Taxation Authority, a major step forward. Not only will this fulfil European-standard requirements it will save hundreds of millions of KM in lost revenue every year and help close off a major source of corruption. Now, the priority is to get the VAT Law, as proposed by the Council of Ministers, enacted so that VAT can be introduced at the start of 2006.

In 2005 war crimes trials will start being heard in BiH. The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina is already hearing major cases involving organised crime. This demonstrates that the State is acquiring an important and indispensable institutional capacity, a core part of the requirement for EU integration, but even more importantly it represents progress in protecting citizens from those who have preyed on this society for too long. Criminals are being locked up – that is the bottom line.

BiH is making progress, and that progress is geared towards Euro-Atlantic integration. BiH's neighbours are following the same integration path. There is a synergy throughout the region – a synergy that supports broad-based, substantial and rapid reform. It is true to say that we are all going to move forward or none of us is going to move forward.

I should make it clear that this synergy has nothing to do with – and is absolutely antithetical to – any putative redrawing of borders. BiH's borders are internationally

recognised and they will not change. Every responsible leader in the region must realise the futility of suggesting otherwise. Too much blood has already been spent. Too many lives have already been lost.

BiH is playing its part in region-wide reform. The end is not simply to make it to some imaginary bureaucratic finishing line with all the "requirement" boxes ticked off. The end is to improve the living standards of the people of this region, to ensure that the threat of political violence is permanently removed, to end the scourge of corruption, trafficking and organised crime, and to ensure that the people of Southeast Europe at last come into the political, economic and social mainstream of the continent. That aspiration will lie at the very heart of our efforts in 2005. I am optimistic that those efforts can be crowned with success.