

Article by Paddy Ashdown, High Representative for BiH: “It’s About a Safe and Prosperous Future for the People of BiH”

Last week I announced measures that will address the failure, till now, of the RS authorities to fulfil their international obligations under the Dayton Peace Agreement. This failure is the principal obstacle to BiH securing membership of Partnership for Peace and beginning negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union.

Over the weekend a number of senior members of the BiH and RS governments have resigned. These events are meant to be serious, and I take them seriously. But no amount of resignations will change the facts on what must be done next. The facts are that, as we approach the tenth anniversary of Srebrenica, the RS has not arrested a single Hague-indicted war criminal. Now, when all this is over, the task that has to be done will still have to be done – cooperation with the ICTY.

It is very important that the nature of my original measures is understood, and it is important that the nature of these resignations is also understood. We are entering a period of political manouvering – the outcome must not jeopardise the real chance, which the citizens of this country now have, of securing a safe and prosperous future, with full membership of the European family.

I am not talking about decades away. I am talking about a

future that is within our grasp. I am talking about economic improvements in the next few years, the prospect of easing of travel restrictions for BiH citizens in the next few years, the systematic expansion of public services in the next few years.

This is the future that the leaders of all the main parties – including the leaders who have just resigned – are publicly committed to securing for their people.

To do this, the RS *must* honour its Dayton obligations, obligations which are binding on this country in international law..

The measures I announced last week are not designed to punish the citizens of the RS. Far from it. These measures have a clear and logical purpose – to provide space, time and means for the RS to get into line with Dayton so that BiH can move forward towards Partnership for Peace and Stability and Association negotiations. In order for the RS to get into line, we must clear away the obstruction – and the institutional systems that facilitate that obstruction – of Dayton implementation.

The RS has had nine years to demonstrate that it is cooperating fully with the ICTY. For nine years it has failed. The problem that the RS is facing is the result of this lack of compliance. All the resignations in the world won't change that. The current crisis is not resignation, but lack of co-operation with the ICTY.

The scandal of Ratko Mladic's stay this summer at Han Pijesak as a guest of the VRS – an organisation that is mandatorily bound to apprehend Mladic and facilitate his transfer to The Hague – is just one example of RS institutional complicity with PIFWCs. This complicity has to be eliminated and the causes of it removed. That is what my measures are about.

Who stands to benefit from the speedy reforms I identified

last week? The people of the RS and of BiH as a whole.

Who stands to lose? A handful of individuals engaged in criminal activity or wanted for war crimes.

Now, why have members of the PDP resigned? Well, they have explained that they acted because they believe the measures I and the US government laid out are inconsistent with the dignity of the RS, or that they are inconsistent with Dayton.

They are neither.

I want to make it clear that my working relations with those who have resigned have always been characterised by respect and in some cases with personal warmth. The measures I announced were clearly and concretely designed to eliminate systemic problems in RS compliance with its international obligations. The leaders who have resigned have again and again stated that they too want to eliminate these problems.

On the constitutional issue, let us be very clear. It is the RS that is in violation of its Dayton obligations. It is in the interest of the RS and its people that this violation is corrected and corrected quickly.

Time is running out.

The window of opportunity to Europe, the window of opportunity to the safe and prosperous future that the people of this country can have, will not stay open indefinitely. Actions taken in the coming weeks and months will be crucial. The resignations do not prevent the governments from fulfilling their obligations. The BiH and the RS authorities continue to have the capacity and the responsibility to act in the interests of citizens. The moment the RS starts cooperating properly with the ICTY, the political weather – and the political prospects for the whole of this country – will change instantly.

I believe that the party leaders – including the leaders that have resigned – understand this. I do not believe they intend to let the opportunity that now stands before the people they represent be lost. I believe that when the reaction of this week is examined carefully, wise counsels will prevail.