

# Article by Paddy Ashdown, High Representative for BiH: “RS Leaders Must Not Fail”

A woman from Pale asked me recently why I assume that most people in this country want to join the European Union – she was inferring, I think, that some citizens might prefer *not* to integrate with the rest of Europe.

It's not a question that's hard to answer. The vast majority of people in this country want to join the European Union because it means their children will have a secure future as part of a stable and prosperous international community.

That means no more standing in line for visas. But of course it means much, much more than that.

It means political stability – EU membership will lock this country firmly into the democratic mainstream. It means access to EU development funds that can help turn the economy around. It means more foreign investment, creating more jobs. It means European standard justice. It means that – in the run up to membership – BiH politicians will have to show common sense and legislate the huge number of laws that are required to bring BiH into line with European standards. Each of those laws will help initiate improvements in living standards.

To make this possible the RS leadership must do better. I believe it *can* do better. In the coming months the RS must work intensively to improve it's record of cooperation with ICTY. Their failure so far, to do so is a failure to fulfil our international obligations and is a direct breach of the Dayton Agreement, in which the peace of the whole country and the existence of the RS itself depends.

The BiH institutions and the IC will do what they can to assist the RS in this. Belgrade too has a key and important role to play in helping the RS authorities to apprehend indicted war criminals. That's the point I made in Belgrade last week when even the senior Serbian authorities admitted that as many as 12 or maybe 13 of those indicted by the Hague from RS are in Serbia and Montenegro. President Tadic, Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic and Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica promised that Belgrade will take the necessary steps to ensure that this cooperation is forthcoming. We must now ensure that that happens.

Meanwhile, in BiH we must focus on the issues that are the priority everywhere else in Europe – how to create more jobs, build more schools and hospitals, raise living standards, and end poverty. The reforms necessary to meet EU standards for the Stabilisation and Association process and the PfP application process are clear. They are also the reforms necessary to make country secure, prosperous and free. –

Defence Reform: to give BiH a unified defence structure that ensures the physical security of BiH citizens and meets NATO requirements; this means dispensing with the superfluous Entity Defence Ministries; it does not mean the abolition of the Entity armed forces, which will continue to exist as components of the BiH defence force. The DRC, together with its RS representatives, said BiH should set NATO as its goal. Why? Because that's what delivers real benefits to the people. It means no more war. No more threat of war. No more fear of war. It means peace, lasting peace.

Police Reform: to introduce a policing system that is based on professional not political requirements, so as to reduce crime and ensure the physical security of BiH citizens, and meet EU Feasibility Study requirements. This is a key element in securing visa-free access to EU countries it is necessary to cut costs in BiH (BiH currently spends twice as much on its 13 police forces than, for instance Hungary and Slovenia does. It

is necessary to give decent pay and a decent career structure and it will make the work of police officers throughout the country much easier.

In February and March I will invite all of the stakeholders to take part in a countrywide debate on police reform (as part of which I will address the RSNA) so that we can explain why the police reform is necessary and focus on getting citizens the efficient and politically unbiased policing they are entitled to. I believe we can reach a workable consensus on this by the spring – as this is an EU requirement and must be agreed by BiH political leadership.

Meanwhile, the central and urgent task is ICTY co-operation. The RS leaders know what they must do. They have promised full co-operation with the ICTY and EU reforms, they must not fail. If they do, they will fail the very people they claim to represent – and everyone will suffer as a result.