

Article by Paddy Ashdown, High Representative in BiH: “Prosecuting War Criminals: A Cornerstone of Justice and Peace”

This Sunday marks the ninth anniversary of the Srebrenica Massacre. The way in which we remember this terrible event – the way in which we challenge the moral outrage of those who committed it – and the moral failures of those (us) who had the power to stop it and didn't – carries a message far beyond the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the families of Srebrenica victims, the broader community of all the nationalities who survived the Balkan bloodletting of the early nineties, and, more and more, those in whose name atrocities were perpetrated – are the ones who will rightly formulate a moral response to these shocking acts of barbarity.

Two weeks ago, Dragan Cavic, the President of Republika Srpska, one of the two Entities established in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Dayton Peace Agreement, gave a television address in which he characterized the Massacre as “a black page in the history of the Serb people.” He said “the perpetrators of this crime cannot justify it to anyone,” and he added that anyone who tried to argue that the killers had acted in the interests of their own people “also committed a crime against their own people.”

Well, of course, words cannot bring the dead back to life – or assuage such powerful evil.

But declarations, made in good faith and accompanied by concrete actions to bring those responsible to justice, can begin the process of reconciliation among the living, and Mr Cavic's remarks may help to do that. Remember Willie Brandt's apology at Auschwitz.

Many others, however, have yet to acknowledge the enormity of what was done at Srebrenica and elsewhere. But to do so is a requirement of justice – and justice is a requirement of reconciliation – and you cannot have lasting peace without both.

Which is why the failure of the authorities in Republika Srpska – still – to arrest a single indicted war criminal in the nine years since Srebrenica is doing such damage to Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to build itself a better future.

That future, everyone agrees, lies within the European Union and NATO. Yet both the EU and NATO have linked Bosnia and Herzegovina's eventual membership to its record of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. Bosnia and Herzegovina can join the Euro-Atlantic institutions, or it can continue to harbor indicted war criminals, but it can't do both.

Which is why last week, I removed 59 individuals from their positions of authority in the Republika Srpska, until such time as Bosnia and Herzegovina and especially its component entity, Republika Srpska, is fulfilling its legal obligation to cooperate with the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

This is a radical measure – nobody is pretending otherwise. But only by cutting away the most obstructionist elements from public and political life could Bosnia and Herzegovina have any chance of breaking the impasse over war criminals that has brought its progress towards Euro-Atlantic institutions screeching to a halt. I could not allow the whole country's future to be held to ransom by a few who believe corruption

and keeping war criminals free is more important than jobs, security and peace for all.

Nine years after the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a changed place. More than a million people have returned to their homes, a multi-billion dollar international recovery program has renewed the once devastated infrastructure, and government policy is firmly focused on consolidating the free-market economy so that it can attract investment and create jobs.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is beginning to look like any other European transition country. Only the continued liberty of fugitives such as Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic is preventing it from making the same journey towards Europe that so many other ex-communist countries have already made.

This weekend the people of Srebrenica, and people all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond, will remember those who were slaughtered nine years ago.

Every single day, as Bosnia moves closer to becoming a normal European country, it puts a distance between itself and that terrible event.

You cannot have peace without justice. And you can't have justice without truth.

The search for the truth about Srebrenica and all the other crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, goes on. It goes on in a courtroom in The Hague, and, in time, it will go on in courtrooms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And beyond this process of justice, lies the possibility of reconciliation. And beyond that a final closure on that terrible war and a renewed focus, not just on remembering the past, but, increasingly, on building the future.

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