Article by the High Representative, Carl Bildt:”Implementing the civilian tasks of the Bonsian Peace Agreement”

Carl Bildt arrives at NATO headquarters on 8 July for meetings with Secretary General Solana and to attend a session of the Council with NATO and Cooperation Partner Ambassadors.
(NATO Photo 46Kb)Arriving in Sarajevo at the end of last year to take up his duties as High Representative, Carl Bildt had to act quickly to set up, virtually from scratch, the necessary infrastructure for implementing the civilian component of the Peace Agreement. It soon became apparent, however, that no matter how efficient the machinery, progress depended on the cooperation of the parties themselves. Much has been achieved, including the release of prisoners of war, the provision by international donors of substantial funds for reconstruction, and the setting up of a Human Rights Coordination Centre to work with the many agencies on the ground. But the key to the success or failure of the Peace Agreement will depend crucially on whether the governments which emerge from the forthcoming elections can create the joint institutions on which the new Bosnia will depend.Admiral Leighton Smith, Commander in Chief Allied Forces Southern Region and Commander of the Implementation Force (COMIFOR) at ceremonies at NATO headquarters on 17 July to mark his retirement.
(NATO photo 27Kb)When I arrived in Sarajevo to start my mission as High Representative just before Christmas last year, I came with a team of five professionals, a briefcase full of UN resolutions and sundry agreed texts, and a somewhat

imprecise mandate. This was in stark contrast to my friend and colleague Admiral Leighton Smith. “Snuffy” did not yet have his full complement of 60,000 IFOR troops. But he inherited some 20,000 professional troops from the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), an infrastructure that was able to function, and had to function, fast. And he was operating on the basis of a plan of action, with precise goals and timetables, which had been honed and developed over a period of twelve months or more.

But there was one perception we shared from the outset. We would succeed or fail together. The military and civilian components of the Peace Agreement were two sides of the same coin. I am happy to say that the smooth cooperation has carried on throughout this exciting period. I am sure it will continue as the burden shifts increasingly to the tasks of civilian implementation for which I carry the responsibility.

If the military mission had to move fast in disengaging the armies and imposing its authority, I also had to move speedily in setting up the joint bodies which for months to come were to be the only fora in which the political representatives of the Bosnia-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska (RS) would meet. When I arrived for the first meeting of the Joint Interim Commission (JIC), with the Prime Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the two entities, the workmen were literally laying the new carpet in the conference room of what used to be the Ministry of Foreign Trade as our guests arrived in reception.

But this inaugural performance was not bad. In those early weeks, as the plastic sheeting around the windows was replaced by glass and the telephone lines were connected up, there was a distinct feeling of progress with some sensible cooperation between the parties and ourselves on a range of practical questions affecting people on both sides of the inter-entity boundary line. It was a shame that the promise of real cooperation between the parties was not to be borne out as

fully as we would have wished.

The work of the Office of the High Representative takes in a huge range of tasks. We also had to lay the groundwork in these early days for our activities in coordinating economic redevelopment and human rights initiatives, working with the international agencies on subjects like refugees and humanitarian projects, and starting the preparations for the elections slated for

14 September. I shall return to these areas later. But it was clear from the start that the most important challenges would lie in our political work both with senior ministers and officials, and in encouraging moves towards something like the political life of a normal Western democracy.

What this means in a society as deeply divided as Bosnia is encouraging reconciliation, often against very long odds. After 42 months of savagery and bitterness, it would be unrealistic to expect Serbs, Croats and Muslims to work together effortlessly. But there were touching scenes early on, as former colleagues and friends met across the divide for the first time since the guns had fallen silent. Apart from the JIC, we had in the Joint Civilian Commission (JCC) a forum to encourage cooperation between each of the parties and the international agencies. This applied both at national level, with senior ministers attending regular meetings of the JCC, and regionally – we have in the meantime set up regional JCCs which cover the north-east around Tuzla and Bijeljina, the north-west around Banja Luka, Doboj and Bihac, and the south based around Mostar.

Head of the UN Police Task Force, Horst Tiemann, listens to an angry resident of Hadzici near Sarajevo.
(AP 54Kb)

Need to respect obligations

However, it was our experience in the early weeks in the

Sarajevo JCC which showed that, however elaborate and efficient the machinery, these joint bodies can only deliver if they are supported by the will of the parties themselves. We were disappointed to see our efforts to encourage the peaceful reintegration of the Serb suburbs into Sarajevo undermined by the extremists on both sides of the divide.
My office spent most of January working out a transitional plan with the political representatives of all of the groups in Sarajevo, together with IFOR, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Police Task Force and other international agencies active on the ground. An informal political agreement was reached on how this would proceed. But when the chips were down, neither side was willing to take the risks which consolidating peace always requires. There was a lack of statesmanship from the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which should have inspired more confidence in the Serbs who were to be its new citizens. And more significantly, hardliners on the Serb side sabotaged the efforts of the moderates.

That was the background to the tragic sight of IFOR soldiers trying in vain to stop Serbs burning down the homes of their own kinsmen and neighbours. Some 8,000 Serbs stayed on, about a tenth of the population and enough to preserve the Serb identity in these neighbourhoods. But this was far fewer Serbs than we had hoped for.

There were lessons for us in seeing what we were up against, and useful experience for our future cooperation with our partners within Bosnia, experience which we would draw upon in dealing with complicated questions like freedom of movement and the right to return of refugees and displaced persons. But the task of holding the Parties to their obligations was clearly going to be immensely difficult. It was all very well to sign up to the principles of Dayton on the other side of the Atlantic. We continued to get handsome signatures on eloquent declarations in far-off cities from Rome and Geneva to Moscow and Florence. The point was to get the parties to

live up to their obligations.

There were successes along the way. For over four months, each of the Parties held out against releasing their prisoners of war, which they were obliged to do under the Peace Agreement. I eventually had to threaten that the international community would withhold economic assistance if they did not release their remaining prisoners – or submit files on their possible indictment on war crimes charges – in time for the Brussels aid-pledging conference in mid-April. The irony was that the blackmail paid off and the Parties did at last meet our requirements on compliance. But in the event, the Republika Srpska decided not to participate in the conference for reasons relating to their own political turmoil at the time.

International donors did honour their promises to raise substantial funds for the reconstruction of the Bosnian economy. Some US$1.8 billion was pledged at the Brussels conference, though some of this was allocated to national or international programmes which fell outside the priority sectors defined by the World Bank and the European Commission who led the fund-raising efforts.

In my view, it was certainly important that so much money was pledged, but it is even more important that it should be spent wisely, in fairness both to the people of Bosnia and to taxpayers in the donor countries. To that end, my office holds meetings at the strategic level both in Brussels and in Sarajevo, where we aim to prevent the agencies stepping on each other's toes and running competing programmes. We also express our concerns where funding is inadequate in the key infrastructural areas like power, water supply, transport and communications. But it is important to understand that we are not an executive agency with programmes and budgets of our own. My job is to coordinate and advise, to monitor and persuade – often to cajole and to be the catalyst.

The Human Rights Coordination Centre brought out a definitve

report on human rights for the mid-term teview conference (above) held in Florence last June.
(AP 38Kb)Human rights is another area where this coordinating role is vital. There is by now a huge body of expertise and case-law on human rights with respect to Bosnia. My office set up a Human Rights Coordination Centre (HRCC) to centralize information, achieve a unity of approach and encourage cooperation rather than competition between the many agencies on the ground. This has been particularly successful organizationally, though the human rights situation with which it is concerned, remains disturbing. The HRCC brought out a well-researched and definitive report on human rights for the mid-term review conference in Florence in June. This work will only increase as we move through elections, investigations on events in the past, and serious efforts to get the structures for dealing with human rights in good order for the Bosnia of the future.
Other fields in which we have been active include mine clearance, where we took the lead with the UN in setting up a Mine Action Centre which will ultimately be taken over by the Bosnian government; exhumation, where we had to create the framework for expert groups to continue the work; and independent television, where we were involved in fund-raising and political support before handing over the project to a network of Bosnian TV producers backed by the International Federation of Journalists. In each of these examples, our role was to provide the impetus for work which others should be able to see through.

The wide variety of these activities is reflected in the weekly OHR (Office of the High Representative) Bulletin which we now produce to keep track of them all. To sustain the pace, my staff has, since that cold winter's day last December, expanded from five to over 70, most of whom work out of the Feroelektro building in Sarajevo. Another 10 to 15 staff members are based at our Brussels Secretariat, providing not only back-up and international liaison for the Sarajevo operation, but also expertise for the parts of my mandate which are not directly related to Bosnia – matters relating to

ex-Yugoslavia, such as regional and minority issues, as well as the thorny legal and financial problems of state succession.

Carl Bildt with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade last May.
(EPA/Belga 40Kb)Nevertheless, events within Bosnia are bound to dominate the latter part of the year. For me, the key question for the success or failure of the Peace Agreement will be whether the governments which emerge from the elections can succeed in creating the joint institutions on which the new Bosnia will be based. We are already doing a great deal of work within the OHR, from a legal and constitutional point of view. I also hold regular meetings on these themes with the parties under the JIC umbrella. This is low-profile, sensitive, painstaking work. But it will be of crucial importance in the long-run.
At the time of writing, the broader question of elections is to the fore. Although it is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which holds the prime responsibility for supervising the elections, my office has been closely involved in many aspects. For instance, we participate in the Provisional Election Commission (PEC) and we are working with a number of Bosnian TV stations to establish an open broadcast network which will aim to improve the media landscape in time for the elections, as well as entrenching pluralism in the media for the long term.

There has also been the whole question of cooperation with the work of the war-crimes tribunal, coupled with the political activities of indicted war-criminals. This theme has overshadowed much of our dealings with the Republika Srpska over this period. We must see justice done through individuals being held to account for their actions, if there is not to be a lingering suspicion of collective guilt over the Bosnian Serb people.

The more I get to know Bosnia, the more I understand the depth of people's insecurities and fears of one another. But I am

more than ever convinced that they will only escape from this psychology of fear by extending a hand to those who were once their neighbours, and will be again. It is bound to take time. Some parts of Europe have needed generations to heal the wounds of war, whether civil war or wars between nations.

The heroes and heroines of that story will ultimately be the Bosnians themselves. As I keep telling them, it is their nation, it is their peace, it is their future. But we in the international community must make sure that we do our bit. I have been fortunate in having on my staff diplomats from every geographical region, every discipline, almost every faith. We and IFOR have in common an example for Bosnia in the way we are showing how well peoples of differing creed and background can work together. The Bosnians were able to do that for generations. It is my deepest hope that they will rediscover afresh the secret of that success.