Article by the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown: “Peacemaking in Bosnia”

Regarding “Time to concede defeat in Bosnia-Herzegovina” (Views, Oct. 10) by William Pfaff:

Suggesting, as Pfaff does, that Bosnia-Herzegovina might usefully be carved up is unacceptable to the international community, and dangerous for the Balkans. First, such a division would deliver a dishonorable victory to individuals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia for “crimes against humanity.” Second, it would lead to conflict. Third, it would immediately block the whole region’s path to Europe. And fourth, it runs so counter to the facts in this country that I can only presume that Pfaff hasn’t been here for some time.

Pfaff says, “Bosnia and Herzegovina have, for practical purposes, already been ethnically cleansed.” Yet since 1995, in this country of 3.7 million people, more than 800,000 refugees have returned; and 300,000 have gone back to parts of the country where they now represent an ethnic minority. In many places, ethnic cleansing has been reversed. A new human right has been developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the right of refugees to return to their homes. This is unique in European history. Ethnic cleansing has taken its toll, but Serbs, Croats and Muslims still live intermingled.

Pfaff advocates division. But who will supervise the new round of ethnic cleansing which must accompany a fresh effort to carve up Bosnia and Herzegovina? What will we do with the 30,000 Serbs and 20,000 Croats living in Sarajevo? What will

we do with the hundreds of thousands of citizens living peaceably with their neighbors in towns and villages where they do not happen to be in a majority? And how will we accommodate a Bosnian statelet where terrorism will be a plausible response?

Any attempt to carve up Bosnia and Herzegovina would produce more bloodshed. Map drawing is easy and tempting. It costs lives. This region has seen too much of it.

Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot endure another war. The division of this country is not in the interests of its people or of the people of Europe. The answer to the divisions raised by borders is not to redraw them, but to make them increasingly irrelevant, as we have done in the European Union. Some 250,000 died the last time people tried to partition Bosnia and Herzegovina. I hope we will not repeat that mistake.