

Article by the High Representative Paddy Ashdown: “Where should the EU’s borders end?”

Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of Europe – geographically, culturally, economically. The aspiration of almost all its citizens is to join the EU and achieving Union membership is the government’s strategic objective. In short, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is firmly inside the EU’s natural long-term borders.

That is why it is a natural member of the Union. And it is EU membership rather than western military forces which will ultimately underpin its stability and prosperity.

One of this country’s most notable characteristics is that possibly a majority of its population is made up of minorities from the neighbouring countries of Serbia and Croatia. Many Bosnians see themselves as Bosnians and Serbs, or Bosnians and Croats. BiH has always been most comfortable when it has been part of some wider political community. That was true when Bosnia was part of the multi-ethnic former Yugoslavia. It will be true again when the countries for the former Yugoslavia are part of the common European political community.

BiH and its neighbours can add value to the European project, just as the countries of central Europe are now doing. Not long ago, it seemed a long and unlikely journey for many of the new accession states. Today, it seems a long haul for Bosnia and Herzegovina – but there is a will to complete this journey. The EU’s task is to sustain that will through practical engagement.

The dividends will be considerable. EU membership offers the

best guarantee that Bosnia and Herzegovina will become a normal and prosperous European state, contributing to the diversity which is the Union's greatest strength. It also offers the best guarantee that BiH will never again be condemned to repeating its history.