

Editorial for Oslobodjenje by Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative for BiH

Saturday is polling day – from Sunday, every day for four years, we will be living with the consequences of how Bosnia and Herzegovina votes on 5 October.

During those four years, the future of this region will be decided. By the next elections, Slovenia will be in the European Union, and Croatia at its gates. Where BiH will be depends on the government you elect on Saturday.

So it's an important weekend.

I have spent the last few weeks criss-crossing the country talking directly to voters. I have made it very clear that I am not supporting individual candidates or parties, but policies and actions.

But there is no alternative to reform. What's clear is that if we keep on doing what we're doing, we will keep on getting what we've got.

The choice on Saturday is stark: reform or fail.

Will Bosnia and Herzegovina move ahead towards Europe with its neighbours over the next four years – attract investment, create jobs, build new schools and hospitals, tackle lawlessness and corruption? Or will this country become the stagnant pool of the Balkans, left behind in poverty and criminality?

Of course, the standard of reform is a popular one, and over the course of the last few months politicians have enthusiastically lined up behind it. But voters are entitled

to be sceptical. The acid test is this: Do they talk about the future, rather than the past? Do they offer a practical way forward that will give your children what they need? And are they prepared to work with all the peoples of BiH to achieve it?

When I speak about reform I am not speaking about vague aspirations or general principles. I am talking about a practical programme that, if implemented, will make life better for all the citizens of this country.

When I came to BiH and began my work here, on 27 May, I made my priorities clear – First Justice, then Jobs, through Reform.

The parameters of such a reform programme are laid out in the agreements reached between the BiH authorities and the International Community at the meetings of the Peace Implementation Council, in July and then again last week.