

Hard Work and Confidence Will Take BiH from Dayton to Brussels

Bosnia and Herzegovina has reached a moment in its postwar history when critical choices will determine whether or not the people of this country are to enjoy a prosperous future inside Europe, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, said on Wednesday. The question facing the citizens of BiH is whether, and how quickly, the dream of a prosperous, secure future in Europe will become a reality.

He said hard work and confidence will determine the future. "Confidence in this country's ability to change, and the hard work needed to bring it about."

The High Representative was speaking in Sarajevo at a Diplomatic Forum organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

He said the regional geopolitical situation had changed decisively, with neighbouring countries now focused on Euro-Atlantic integration, so that "a change of government in Zagreb, or Belgrade, no longer sends shock waves through BiH." But he warned that "it would be a tragedy, just at the point when the curse of conflict has been lifted, if those who sought a Greater Croatia or a Greater Serbia were to be replaced by those who seek a 'pocket Bosnia'. There is only one future for this country – as BiH, whole and free, in a Europe, whole and free."

The High Representative noted that BiH's leaders have recognised a sea change in the aspirations of voters. "Whatever their political orientation, the politicians of this country know that the dream of Europe is now becoming more

powerful than the myths of the past, and that the people of this country expect them to deliver the reforms that will make that dream a reality." As a result, "we are moving out of the era of Dayton and into the era of Brussels."

The High Representative pointed out that this historic turning point demands fundamental changes in the conduct of governments, parliaments and institutions, the International Community and the OHR.

He said "the European Union has made it crystal clear that it wants BiH as a member," and that in the next six months BiH must move decisively from 'post-conflict' to 'pre-accession' mode, which will place the emphasis on economic transition and social reform. In this respect, he said, the last week's parliamentary approval of defence and indirect tax reforms may be viewed as a promising sign of willingness to move BiH "down the path to European accession and NATO membership."

The EU Commission has listed 16 policy areas on which the BiH authorities have to make tangible and verifiable progress during the next 210 days in order to begin Stability and Association negotiations. However, the High Representative warned that these conditions will not be met "if the current rate of progress is not dramatically increased." At the very least, the governments and parliaments should meet more often in order to increase their output dramatically, he said.

Progress has been made so far not through the Bonn powers of the High Representative, he said "but the power of a dream. A dream that this country can one day become a member of the European Union. Can one day become a member of NATO. Can one day become a normal country, capable of providing a better and safer life for its citizens."

Amid solid progress on refugee return, police retraining and restructuring of the judiciary, the International Community is moving from 'doing' to 'monitoring', the High Representative

said, pointing out that in his first six months, he had to impose 70 laws or amendments to laws, compared to 34 such interventions in his second six months, and just two interventions in the last six months.

He warned that the BiH authorities must not confuse "declarations, promises and plans" with real implementation.

By the 30 June next year (in addition to completing the reform of the intelligence sector in the next couple of months) the BiH authorities must fulfil four EU conditions on the rule of law, including getting SIPA up and running, seven conditions on economic reform, including making the ITA operational, with a Director appointed, three conditions on government efficiency, including getting governments and parliaments to meet more frequently, one condition requiring the BiH authorities to take steps to ensure the long-term viability of a financially and editorially independent and state-wide public broadcasting service, and one condition requiring the country to comply with all international agreements, notably the Dayton Peace Agreement and the EU Road Map. This last condition includes full cooperation with the ICTY, which means the apprehension and transfer to The Hague of indicted war criminals.

This programme of solid, practical reform must be implemented before a new EU Commission is formed since "firm friends and strong advocates" of BiH on the present Commission, including Romano Prodi and Chris Patten, "have made it plain that they would like to invite BiH to open negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement before they leave office in October," the High Representative said. "BiH would be foolish to miss that opportunity by failing to meet the conditions that have been set."

He warned that legitimate popular demands for better living conditions cannot be met by "offering people things we cannot afford". That, the High Representative said, "is the shortest

route from low pensions to no pensions," and he called on the BiH authorities to take urgent steps to attract international investment.