

High Representative Press Conference on the plateau in front of the State Institutions Building in Sarajevo

12:30 Friday 16 June 2006

Good afternoon. Thanks for coming at short notice.

I've asked you here today to talk about the work of the institution behind me; about how important it is to democracy; about how important it is to the future of this country; and about how it can and should work in the interests of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of all constituent peoples.

As you are all well aware, this Parliament has not met for more than three weeks.

This is because of a boycott of parliamentarians by one constituent people. Indeed, a full session of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina has not met since I addressed it on 24 May.

This is unacceptable to me as High Representative, and it is unacceptable to me as a former parliamentarian.

But most important – this is unacceptable to the citizens and peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Parliament is the highest decision-making body in a democracy. If Parliament stops working, democracy stops functioning.

The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina voted for their political representatives in good faith. Parliamentarians should never – I repeat – never deprive citizens of their democratic right to political representation.

The Dayton Constitution builds in safeguards to protect the rights of every people of Bosnia and Herzegovina . This includes the right to veto legislation that is deemed to be destructive of a vital interest of the Bosniac, Croat or Serb people.

But a veto can only be used on the merits of a particular issue. A veto cannot be used to prevent Parliament from meeting. It cannot be used to obstruct the functioning of democracy. And it cannot be used to block dialogue.

To use a veto in such a way is destructive of the vital interests of not one, but of all of Bosnia and Herzegovina 's constituent peoples. And it is against the interests of every citizen of this country.

Yesterday, I met with the speaker of this parliament – with Martin Raguz – and with his two deputies – with Sefik Dzaferovic and with Nikola Spiric – and they agreed to resume the last session of parliament on Monday and to convene the next session on Tuesday.

This is a step in the right direction. But it does not begin to resolve the issue of delegates blocking the work of the institution behind me, of bringing it into disrepute and, as I said in my address to Parliament, of turning it into an *Inat kuća*, a house of spite.

This Parliament has a heavy legislative programme in front of it. Laws on Higher Education, Obligations, Banking Supervision, Pharmaceuticals and other critical areas are all waiting to be passed. They are fundamental to the well being of all citizens of this country, irrespective of their ethnic identity.

Some people seem to believe that I should use my Bonn powers to impose these laws and punish or remove individuals who block the work of Parliament.

But as I have repeatedly made clear since becoming High Representative, I will not do the jobs that the institutions and elected leaders of this country must do.

I have come to assist, advise and advocate and thus to help Bosnia and Herzegovina become a "normal" European country.

In "normal" European countries, there are consequences for parliamentarians who boycott and block the work of their Parliaments.

I have asked the speaker and his two deputies to recommend penalties that will be imposed in the event of a repetition of the boycott of the past three-and-a-bit weeks. They have promised to present their recommendations in one month's time.

The international community will be monitoring the work of this institution next week in advance of the meeting of the Peace Implementation Council.

Parliament is the pinnacle of a democracy. It is a privilege to be a Member of Parliament. And Parliament must function if democracy is going to flourish and this country is to have a future.