

High Representative's TV Address

Good evening.

Tonight, I am speaking particularly to the citizens of Mostar.

But my message is also for all the citizens of this country. For all the people who have suffered from irresponsible politicians, from dysfunctional government, from poor public services, from high taxes.

We all have our Mostars. Belfast, Jerusalem, even Berlin – troubled cities that became symbols of division. Cities whose problems undermined hope and optimism for the future, and poisoned the politics of their countries. It is not for nothing that Mostar has the highest rates of youth emigration in the country. We must stop the future leaving Mostar, just as we must offer a future to the young people of this city and of BiH as a whole.

That is why Mostar has been taking up a lot of my time in recent weeks. And why I am speaking to you tonight.

Today I have taken the decision to give legal force to a new Statute for the City of Mostar.

As many of you will know, the Old Bridge of Mostar is being rebuilt and will be reopened this year, a powerful symbol of the physical reunification and reconstruction of this country.

At the same time, we have been building a political bridge. All Mostar's political representatives have been participating in a Commission for Reforming the City of Mostar. And they did a reasonable job – indeed, they managed to agree 90% of a new Statute for the City.

The decision I have taken today represents only the last 10% of the agreement – the keystone for the bridge that will at last reunite this great city and give it a future. And in making these decisions I have had only one thing in my mind. What is in the best interests of the citizens of Mostar as a whole – of all the citizens, not just one group; of all the constituent peoples, not just one people.

The new Statute will not come into force for six weeks, to give those responsible for the provision of services a period of time to prepare for the change. But we cannot delay the implementation of the new Statute any further than this if it is to be in place in time for the October elections.

What does this mean for the citizens of Mostar? Well, in practical terms it won't make any immediate difference. Tomorrow, the same people will be responsible for providing you with the same services at the same place and in the same way as yesterday. But in six weeks time, those officials will work, not for the municipalities, but for the new, unified, single City Government. Over time, this will deliver real, noticeable, benefits for Mostarians.

How? Let me explain. The six city municipalities currently take KM 310 a year from the pocket of every man, woman and child in Mostar. That money will in future be spent on the citizens, not on politicians.

Mostar will have a less expensive, more united, and more efficient administration under this Statute. "But" you may ask "at what price?"

Given Mostar's recent past, it is totally understandable that people fear a Mostar dominated by one people or group. They want to be protected by guarantees, not promises. That is why the new Statute provides these guarantees, not in the form of inefficient parallel ethnic structures as in the past, but in the form of weighted voting, power sharing, Vital National

Interest mechanisms, and decision-making rules that prevent any one constituent people governing the city alone. Is this new? No. Is it dangerous? No. This is no more than replicating in Mostar the guaranteed protections that already exist elsewhere in BiH.

Whether or not Mostar succeeds in overcoming the divisions and bitterness of the past and embracing a prosperous and stable future depends, ultimately, not on me but on your political leaders – no-one else.

As High Representative, I can show the way. But I can't take you there. Only your politicians can do that. Only they can make the new Statute of Mostar work. Only they can wreck it. The international community will not step in to run Mostar if they don't want to do the jobs you pay them to do.

But what I can promise you is that I will hold your politicians to account. If they refuse to act in the interests of the citizens who elected them and pay them, then I will use all the power at my disposal to persuade them to. And I will not just be asking the politicians of Mostar to put the interests of the citizens first and make Mostar work. I will also be holding the national leaders of Mostar's political parties responsible for making Mostar work. It is simply not good enough for them to say it is not their problem; or that they have no control over their parties in Mostar.

As the guardian of the Dayton Peace Agreement, I have specific responsibilities for Mostar, whose status is defined in Dayton. This is my responsibility. I cannot dodge it, and I won't. But it does not apply in the same sense to other BiH cities.

But I hope that the solutions we find for Mostar will serve as a guide and an inspiration for other cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Whether that happens and how it happens, however, is not my responsibility, but that of your domestic leaders.

One final word. This cannot be done without you. If you want a new future for your city, tell your politicians. Make sure your voice is heard.

Then Mostar can at last become a model for the future, rather than a curse from the past.