

Open Letter from the High Representative to the Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina

A year ago, I had the honour and privilege of taking up the position of High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We've achieved a lot in the last year; but there's a great deal more to do.

I said, when I began this job, that my priorities would be justice and jobs. These are still my priorities today, because I know they are your priorities, and everything I have seen and heard over the last year has confirmed that.

Change is often difficult. The results here in BiH are sometimes hard to see as one goes about the daily and often difficult business of living and getting by. But slowly and surely, we are making progress, real progress.

We have, over the last year, created many of the weapons we need to fight crime. The new Court of BiH is about to prosecute its first case – the biggest human trafficking and prostitution case ever to come to trial in this country.

We are cleaning up politics. We have drastically reduced immunity for politicians, and demanded that they take political responsibility when things go wrong.

But politics, corruption and criminality still live far too close together in this country, and we need to break these links.

We have started to lift the lid on the massive corruption in our public utilities.

We still need to rid BiH of the war criminals who cast a shadow over this beautiful country. But we have recently widened the battle against those who support and fund war criminals, freezing their assets and preventing their travel to Europe. .

But what about the economy, what about jobs?

Everything we are doing to build the rule of law will, in the long run, also help to bring investment and jobs to this country.

Already, BiH is a better place to do business than it was a year ago, thanks to the reforms of the last year. Take the work of the Bulldozer Committee, for example. Made up of BiH's most successful businessmen, it has bulldozed through 50 of the laws and regulations that suffocate initiative and flair, making BiH a better place to invest and an easier place to create jobs.

Meanwhile, we are cleaning up and simplifying the tax system, cutting down on the rampant fraud and waste by establishing a single Customs and VAT system. That will be a huge step forward. It will allow more money to go where it's needed – into public services for you, instead of into the pockets of criminals.

We have established a proper central government, with a prime minister at its head, just like any normal European democracy.

And we are finally starting to sort out the mess of our armed forces and intelligence services following the Arms-to-Iraq and spying affairs. Everyone knows the security apparatus in BiH needs reform. Now it is going to happen.

So, we have made a start. But only a start. We have a long way to go, and we have to move faster still.

This country must play its part in the regional fight against

organized crime and corruption.

We must accelerate the process of economic reform. Privatisation and modern bankruptcy courts are essential to free up our resources and open BiH to investment. Things will, I am afraid, have to get harder before they get easier. But we have no choice. There is no easy way to reform, as Hungary, Poland and others have shown.

Prime Minister Terzic has set 2009 as BiH's target date for joining the European Union. That's very ambitious. It can be achieved, but only if we reform, and reform fast. All the countries in this region will join Europe one day. But the countries that reform fastest will get in quickest. We are already in danger of being left behind.

Let me be absolutely clear – because some of BiH's leaders seem not to be on this point. I owe you a duty of truth, even when that truth is hard. So here it is.

Europe's leaders will not open their door to us as an act for charity. If we don't reform to meet European standards then we stay out and we stay poor. It is as simple as that.

The days of charity are past. BiH's future is now in its own hands. If we don't do it, no-one is going to do it for us.

The message from Brussels is clear. In future; no gifts. Europe will give us support – they may even increase their support. But only after we have reformed, not before.

You can count on me to work with Europe to get the best deal, but I can only do that if your governments do their bit first.

You can also count on me to work with the people you choose to run this country to achieve that goal. And you can count on me to take action if they are failing to live up to Europe's standards or your expectations.

I am a practical man. And politics, as I see it, is a

practical business. It is about identifying problems and solving them. And that is what the reform process is ultimately about. About creating a better life for you, and for your children.

That is why I have tried to get out of Sarajevo as often as possible to meet, and listen to, the people of this country. Over the past year, I have traveled all over BiH, and have talked to thousands of people from all communities. I have stayed with women in Srebrenica, refugees in Banja Luka, returnees in Bugojno

Everywhere I have gone, I have seen the same thing: No matter how difficult the circumstances, no matter how big the problems, people are getting on with their lives, building their homes and their businesses, providing for their children, looking to the future.

That is why I remain optimistic for Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a remarkable country, with talented, determined people.

Together, we have made good progress in this last year.

But, we need to move even farther – and faster – in the year ahead.