

Remarks by Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays At a Meeting of Mayors and Speakers of Central Bosnia Canton Municipalities

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are holding this discussion at an exciting point in this country's political development. The Federation Parliament has recently approved the necessary amendment to the constitution and the implementing law that will allow for the direct election of mayors this year. On 2 October the citizens in municipalities across BiH will choose the men and women, who will lead them for the next four years.

This changes the political landscape in a fundamental way, because it *empowers* municipal officials and the citizens alike. It also opens the way for a new generation of politicians.

And not just any elected officials.

Mayors function at the point where politics and the people's interests intersect most critically – in the daily lives of each citizen – rubbish collection and street lighting and children's day care; they process the documents that define our lives – birth certificates and wedding certificates and all sorts of other certificates. The municipality is the lowest rung of government, but for most citizens it is this tier that affects their basic interests, more so than the Cantons or the Entities.

So the implications of this reform must and can not be

underestimated.

One of the strengths of reforms like this is that the outcome will depend on the citizens themselves and not on a small group of politicians operating in the back room. Of course if you let the status quo remain that will be your choice. But you now have that choice at the ballot box. You can engineer whatever change in municipal politics you deem to be in your interests.

However, the political parties can and should play a role in this reform – they need to recognize that to make the most of a new electoral system they have to put forward new candidates with fresh ideas and a vision of tomorrow's BiH.

The position of an elected mayor, one who will truly represent the citizen's interests is a pivotal one, in the municipalities and in the political fabric of the country as a whole. The electorate will not be content if they are offered a choice of overly familiar names.

The October elections present a remarkably good opportunity for the political parties to introduce a new generation of politicians.

Youth, energy, new ideas, a fresh approach; BiH could do with an infusion of these qualities and the parties can take advantage of the extension of direct mayoral elections to the Federation to produce just such an infusion.

They are already competing for votes – it would be nice to see them competing to come up with the largest number of candidates under 35 men and women.

It is significant that this change came from popular pressure – pressure in large part from mayors themselves. You understand the power of a democratic mandate – it will provide mayors with the political legitimacy they need in order to promote the interests of their constituents as a primary

political objective, and to resist interference from those who would distort the municipal agenda for pure political interests. Your mayor must put the interests of the citizens and their needs ahead of those of pure political interests. There is a place of political interest but not at the expense of the citizens'

But the mayors were not alone in supporting this reform, polls indicated that almost 80 percent of citizens supported the direct election of mayors.

This change in the manner of selecting a mayor will not bring about instant change by itself. But now that the constitutional issue has been resolved, you can focus our efforts on improving the way in which municipalities operate, and those of you who are elected in October can do this with the following wind of a popular mandate to give momentum to your legislative agenda.

You need to get the citizenry, all of it involved in developing the agenda for your towns and villages – A great deal needs to be done and no one person can do this by themselves. If BiH municipalities are to become authentic service centers – judged on their capacity to provide optimum services to citizens – then further basic issues now have to be resolved.

- Paying for the country's sprawling government weakens municipalities by diverting resources that are needed to provide services to citizens
- Overlapping competencies between levels of government render service delivery confusing and incomplete. Competencies are blurred between municipalities and cantons in particular, and the result is wasted layers of government with little benefit in terms of services
- Municipalities are insufficiently equipped to take on appropriate tasks.

Having a popular mandate will help you to make your case in a public forum and work together to persuade your political parties, the Cantons and the Federation Government that steps will need to be taken quickly to address these issues. That in turn will launch a process of rehabilitating municipal government in BiH.

With the democratic tools at your disposal you are in a position to effect real change. Do not think in terms of making your municipalities simply *acceptable*, or *tolerable*, or *livable*.

Think in terms of creating municipalities that are *desirable* places to live, that compete every day to offer their residents the very best in terms of service. This is the kind of ethos that is reflected in efficiently maintained parks, a cleaner environment, better more responsive bureaucrats, more functional systems to address their needs and a system by which they can inform public officials about their concerns and priorities. These will be things that are properly maintained and consequently a source of pride.

It is something that many of you are already striving to do. Let us use today's discussion to explore ways in which you can usefully cooperate with one another in order to move forward together. The Federation Parliament has given the municipalities new possibilities – now it is up to you to make the most of that.

Thank you