

Remarks by the High Representative for BiH, Paddy Ashdown, to the UN Security Council

It is just four months since I last spoke to the Council. You have before you our detailed report on developments in the last half of 2004, so I do not intend this morning to cover all the ground in that report in detail.

Let me just pick out the highlights.

First, the Council will recall that when I was last here – just 16 weeks ago – I warned in stark terms of the threat posed to BiH's future by the failure of the RS authorities in particular to honour their obligation to co-operate fully with the ICTY.

I warned the Council bluntly that this failure was now the biggest stumbling block to a brighter future for BiH – an obstacle that risked bringing to a complete halt in BiH's progress towards the EU and NATO.

A few weeks later, the NATO Ministerial rejected for the second time BiH's application to join PfP. I followed that announcement with further measures to address individual obstruction of the ICTY and systemic changes to the RS's security structures.

Foreign Minister Ivanic resigned briefly in protest, although he has now had a change of heart; and the government in the RS changed its leadership, but not its make up.

But now it seems that the message has been getting through. I am happy to report to the Council that the RS has now started,

10 years after Dayton , to hand over indictees to the Tribunal.

It is early days – and only natural that seasoned observers should remain skeptical.

But I do now believe we may be seeing a change in the attitude of the RS authorities, and an acceptance that the way to Brussels to the EU and to NATO, lies through The Hague .

In the last two months, the RS authorities have transferred – either on their own, or working – and this is itself a step in the right direction – with the authorities in Belgrade , five indictees to The Tribunal.

Four of these transfers have taken place in the last two weeks.

Earlier today, Vinko Pandurevic, indicted for genocide and crimes against humanity at Srebrenica, arrived in The Hague.

Pandurevic and other generals have handed themselves in. But their commander, Ratko Mladic, remains on the run.

Mladic might reflect on the fact that it is a curious military code in which a general lets his subordinate officers carry the can for actions they carried out in his name ,while he scurries from safe house to safe house like a common criminal.

Now, I do not claim that the events of the last few weeks yet constitute the full co-operation that the Tribunal requires.

Ten years after Srebrenica, the call of justice doesn't fade away and must not fade away. This process will not end until Karadzic and Mladic and every other indictee is in custody. The sooner that day comes, the sooner BiH will start to discard the chains of history.

I commend the RS authorities for the progress of the last few weeks. The crucial thing now is that it continues.

But we cannot tolerate any slackening of effort. There is no scope for that.

Because – and this is my second point – as winter gives way to spring, BiH faces some fundamental decisions about its future by the EU and NATO. For both organizations, co-operation with the ICTY is non-negotiable, as the EU's recent decision on Croatia has shown.

NATO, I know, is keeping the question of BiH's PfP application under close review.

For its part, the European Commission has made clear that it hopes to be able to form a view as to whether BiH is ready to begin negotiations on an SAA in mid May. This is the first formal step on the long road to membership.

On Monday, EC Enlargement Commissioner Rehn met Prime Minister Terzic in Brussels . In addition to ICTY co-operation, he made clear the other cardinal issue on which the EC expected to see significant progress before mid May was on police restructuring, in line with the principles the Commission has repeatedly espoused.

The Police Reform Commission finalized its work in December and presented its recommendations in January. It recommends the creation of a single state level policing structure, but with operational policing delegated to the local level. It proposed a map drawing up new police areas based on operational efficiency, which means that areas cross the IEBC where it is operationally expedient.

The Commission's proposals are currently being debated. Most agree the system needs to change. Most BiH citizens believe that there is too much political influence in policing; that they get a poor service from their police; and that the criminals get away too often.

But there is great unfounded anxiety in the RS that an end

to poor policing arrangements are really a clever ploy to abolish the RS itself.

Let me state categorically again that is not the case.

But nevertheless, police restructuring must happen, in line with the European Commission's principles, if BiH wants to get the green light from Brussels in May: that's the choice the RS faces.

Third, we are continuing to move ahead with rest of our reform agenda, in line with the four core tasks set out in the OHR's Mission Implementation Plan.

The new War Crimes Chamber and maximum-security prison facilities opened in Sarajevo earlier this month.

The Indirect Tax Authority started full operation in January. The Single Account is working. Overall, preliminary information reveals revenues are up on the same period last year by 5%-6%.

On defence reform, NATO took over the leadership of the IC on this issue at the turn of the year. The goals for 2005 include amalgamating the functions of the entity MoDs into the BiH Ministry of Defence, establishing a single defence budget, and creating single personnel, logistics, and training commands. BiH needs to make progress on schedule on these objectives, if it is to satisfy the requirements of PfP and if it is to rectify, as it must, the systemic weaknesses which NATO, Carla del Ponte and I have highlighted.

If it does so, it will have made huge strides – not just towards membership of PfP, but in due course to the Alliance itself. There have, however, been signs in recent days of backsliding on defence reform by the authorities in the RS. I accept that we are asking a lot of the RS authorities: but they must be clear what is at stake, both for them and the country as a whole. Just as we are – at last – making progress

on the hitherto intractable issue of ICTY co-operation, it would be foolish in the extreme to go backwards on other key requirements.

Finally, there has been one other significant development since I last spoke to the Council – the switch from the NATO-led Stabilisation Force to the EU-led force, EUFOR. This has passed off extremely well. That, I guess, is the definition of a seamless transition. EUFOR is operating effectively, as is the new NATO Headquarters, and the two are working well together.

Mr Chairman, this will be my penultimate report to this Council as High Representative and EU Special Representative. I will relinquish my post at the end of the year. But there are nine months left between now and then, and we need to make full use of every single day.

Because this is a crucial year for BiH. The tenth anniversary of Srebrenica. The tenth anniversary, later in the year, of Dayton.

Like most people in BiH, I want this to be a year in which BiH remembers its past, but looks to its future. More than that, I want this to be the year in which BiH makes a decisive break with that past by meeting the requirements for SAA and PfP, and starts to embed itself firmly into the Euro Atlantic structures. Those structures are the best guarantee of BiH's long term stability, security and prosperity. Once that happens, BiH really will be into a new era. The era of stabilization under Dayton is drawing to a close. The next phase – integration and Brussels – is beginning.

That opportunity is now available to BiH – the chance to show that, a decade after Dayton, it is a viable state, irreversibly on course for European integration, with politicians at the helm who accept the duties, obligations and standards expected of high office in equal measure.

If this happens, it should open the way very soon, I suggest, for a different kind of international engagement on the ground, less intrusive, more like the support structures in other transitional democracies.

But the next few months will be decisive.