Speech by Donald Hays, Principal Deputy High Representative to the RSNA

Let me start by conveying to you the High Representative's apologies for not being able to come here to address you today.

He has asked me to come and speak to you on his behalf, and to assure you that he will make good on his commitment by coming up to address you in person at the earliest opportunity.

I intend to speak only for a few minutes – to leave as much time as possible for questions afterwards on any issue that you choose to raise.

A partnership with the people

We in OHR hope that this will represent the start of an ongoing dialogue, not only with you, but also through you, with the people of Republica Srpska, the people we are all here to serve.

For ultimately, that is what this chamber is about. Not the pursuit of individual power, or party political advantage. But about promoting the interests of the people out there, who, like people everywhere, long for a better life – a better future.

And that future, as the Presidents of BiH, Yugoslavia and Croatia made clear last week, is a democratic future and a European future. There is no alternative. There is no other way.

But getting there will not be easy.

It means reforming our structures and our practices.

It means establishing the rule of law, opening up the economy and modernising government.

And, more than anything else, it means listening to the people, to their concerns and to their demands.

If we are serious about doing that – about putting people first –we must start pulling together and we all must see ourselves as servants of the people – the municipalities, the entities, the state and the international community – in pursuit of the people's priorities. Looked at that way, the challenge facing us becomes clear.

As the High Representative said on the day he arrived in BiH, just two months ago, "We succeed together, or we fail together." I would rephrase that, "if you succeed, this country succeeds." It's as simple as that".

A partnership with the State

But succeeding together means working together in a new spirit of openness and trust. First and foremost, this should apply to the different levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And particularly between the Republica Srpska and the BiH state.

We must change the mindset that sees every attempt to build up the BiH state as an attempt to undermine the Republic Srpska. This is a myth borne out of suspicion and rooted in bad faith. It is a myth we would do well to disabuse ourselves of. There are, simply put, some things that must be done at the State level if you are to foster trade and international cooperation.

There is no rule that says that strengthening the state must weaken the entities. This is the argument that is currently being used to oppose the implementation of the Public Service Broadcasting law. The suggestion is that the creation of PBS, must, by definition, necessarily harm RTRS.

I have to tell you, this is simply not the case. The effect of this law is simply to create an efficient and politically independent broadcasting service capable of delivering high quality programming to the people you represent.

Add to this the fact that getting the PBS law through this Assembly would take us a long way towards the completion of the EU road map, a plan that will ultimately create needed benefits for the people of this country! I hope to clarify why continued obstruction of this process is in no one's interest.

The institutions of BiH, if you use them properly, do not represent some external threat to the RS. On the contrary, they are designed to work with the other levels of government in the service of the RS and of your people.

State institutions can open up new markets, increase trade and exports, and lever in investment.

They can tackle inter-entity and international crime and begin to deal with high-level corruption and fraud.

And they can do what everyone in BiH wants them to do – to take this country to a more prosperous and secure future as a member of the European family of nations, and ultimately, of the European Union itself.

So from this point on, let's start to measure the success of those delegates in the BiH Parliament who are elected from the RS, not by how much they obstruct but by how they work to improve the future of the people of this country through laws they approve.

You simply cannot afford to stand in the way of reform. We don't have enough time to block important changes. Time is not standing still. Your potential markets are being taken by your neighbors as they embrace necessary reform.

Here in the RS, the economy is in recession, salaries are low and unemployment is high.

People want change. They expect change. And together, we need to ensure that they get it.

A partnership with the International Community

Which brings me back to the question of partnership, and of trust. To the question of how you, in this chamber, should relate, not only to the state, but also to the international community.

Now, I know that sometimes High Representative decisions are not popular – particularly here in this chamber. And we would like to avoid imposing laws whenever we can. But every action we take, every decision we make, is about delivering real, tangible benefits for the people of the RS and of BiH.

So the question is not 'will the International Community continue to insist on reform'. You know we will. The real question is whether you will reform with us – will you take ownership of that process, and drive the changes through yourselves?

This is the way to avoid impositions. Not by asking the international community to slow down, but by urging your colleagues to speed up the tempo of reform.

The RS Government has implemented some important reforms. The changes within the RS tax administration show what can be achieved with determination and a real commitment to change. Compulsory re-registration of companies has revealed that over 50 percent were "fictitious" – companies used as tax evasion vehicles. At the same time, the tax reforms have resulted in increased revenues – that means more money to spend on priority issues like health, pensions and education.

But there is much, much more still to be done. And Bosnia and

Herzegovina cannot wait. Republica Srpska cannot wait. It's time to deliver.

And in particular, it's time to deliver on the economy and the rule of law.

Jobs

Let's look at the specific, practical, achievable things that you can do to help businesses, attract investment and stimulate growth in the economy:

You must urge the government to complete the RS Electricity Law and pass it through this Assembly as soon as possible so that companies in the RS can get the reduced power bills they will need if they are to invest and grow.

You could help cut back on the raft of unnecessary regulations and on the bureaucracy that makes it so difficult to run an honest business and that drives so many of your people into the gray economy.

By pressing ahead with the harmonization of economic legislation in the areas of taxation, business registration and property ownership, you can begin to turn the 'idea' of a single economic space into a firm reality.

By getting the law on Land Registry Books onto the statute book, you can make the RS a more attractive proposition for investors and provide an important fillip to the privatization process.

And by implementing laws on bankruptcy and liquidation that banks need if they are to lend, you can give a big boost to small businesses and new, private enterprises that are seeking to invest and expand.

However, just as critical to this process is the need to implement these laws once passed and to enforce their provisions.

Justice

The same goes for the fight against crime and corruption. By taking quick and decisive action in this chamber, you could lead the way in the fight against the high level criminal networks that are robbing your government of its revenues, and depriving your people of services and benefits. Furthermore, this step will help convince the people of the RS that you are on their side in this fight.

Aggressively rooting out corruption at all levels of public administration is key in this respect. Only then will your government be able to secure its revenue base and provide for the elderly and the vulnerable.

Justice reform must be comprehensive, from the police to Prosecutors, the Courts and the Prison system.

Pressing ahead with judicial reform is also crucial. Exposing corruption and fraud is of little use if the court system is not capable of successfully prosecuting these crimes. That is why getting the High Judicial Council operational by the autumn is so important. Because it will hasten the day when BiH has the high-quality judges and prosecutors it deserves.

I also urge you to support the Court of BiH and in particular the establishment of Special Chambers and Prosecutor's departments to deal with complex economic and financial crimes.

To give this, and the other courts across BiH the tools they need to operate, we are in the process of introducing a new state level criminal and criminal procedure code. The criminal procedure code will provide Prosecutors with the tools that are needed to fight the complex and organized crimes. It is crucial that the criminal procedure codes at all levels in BiH are harmonized, so that the same rights apply to everyone, no matter where they are living. We must work together to ensure that the entity codes dovetail exactly with

these laws, if the fight against crime is to be a coordinated and effective one.

That is what I mean by partnership. The different levels of government and the international community coming together to work in the interests of the people – all the people – of BiH.

Working together to deliver economic growth, jobs and prosperity for the honest and hardworking people of this country.

Working together to ensure that the rule of law is applied, effectively and impartially, in the interests of the ordinary person, not just the powerful and the politically connected.

Working together to change things, not to keep them as they are.

That is the partnership that is on offer.

We hope you will play your part.

We in the international community cannot do this job for you. All of you must see yourselves as guardians of the public trust and servants of the people. If you play this role properly, the people will join forces with you in fighting crime and corruption. And that is the only way to ensure a secure and successful future for this entity and, ultimately, this country