

Speech by HR on the closure of OHR Mostar



Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you all to the Hotel Bristol.

Many of you have travelled from across the Herzegovina region and even further afield to be with us today, to mark the closure of the OHR South Office in Mostar.

So we are here to close the OHR South Office in Mostar, but ultimately today is NOT about the OHR.

Today is about the future of Mostar, today is about the future of the wider Herzegovina region (kraj), today is about your future and the future of the citizens you represent and serve.

For today, we have reached an important stage post on the journey from conflict and division to peace and integration – today the responsibility for taking this city and this region forward has been placed firmly in your hands.

No ifs, no buts, no maybes, this is what is happening today.

We have not reached this point by chance, but through hard work and determination – over a long period of time – to overcome the obstacles that have stood in the way of implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement. In so doing we have put in place the foundation for a better and dignified life for the citizens of this country.

The OHR South Office, which succeeded the European Union

Administration of Mostar (EUAM) in 1997, has played a pivotal role in the progress that has been made in Mostar and the wider Herzegovina region over the last 13 years and we are rightly proud of what has been achieved.

The staff of the OHR South Mostar has worked tirelessly to improve citizens' daily lives, and at times they have risked their lives to do so.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of all the staff of OHR South over the years, many of whom have spent a significant part of their working lives in the service of this city and this country.

I would like to thank them all at this occasion.

I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to the current head of OHR Mostar, Anatoly Viktorov, who like all those who preceded him – Sir Martin Garrod, Richard Ellerkmann, Finn Lynghjem, Colin Munro, Ambassador Jean-Pierre Berçot and Ambassador Jacques Andrieu – have lead the OHR South with genuine commitment. Thank you, Anatoly [*Anatoly comes forward and HR shakes him by the hand*].

I would now like to ask you to applaud them all.

As we are gathering here today, it is worth taking a moment to look back at what has been achieved because what we have achieved, we have achieved in partnership with you and the rest of the international community.

- The reconstruction of infrastructure – roads, bridges, electricity grids and hospitals across the region;
- The return of thousands of displaced persons and refugees to their homes;
- The unification of the administration of the City of Mostar;

- The establishment of numerous other federation, canton and municipal institutions
- And many other important political, economic and judicial reforms.

And as progress has been made throughout the region, the 100 OHR staff working in the areas of Political Affairs, Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons, Media, Economy, Human Rights, Legal Affairs, Judicial Reform and Anti-Corruption have been reduced to the 20 who remain today.

With the closure of OHR South today, we close one chapter and open a new one, but we do so in the knowledge that while the foundation and framework for a better future has been laid, the job has not yet been fully completed.

Here in Mostar, for example, we have unified the City Administration, but we know that more remains to be done before we can say the City is unified. Putting in place the institutions for unification is important, but so is creating an atmosphere that fosters integration.

Today you take on a huge responsibility and you face a test, but most of all you have a big opportunity.

I believe you have the potential to seize it.

I will not go on much longer, but before I end my speech, there are two points I would like to be crystal clear on:

The first is that the closure of OHR South is not the complete withdrawal of the international interest. I will retain a three-man team in Mostar that will work under my guidance. The OSCE has given them a home in their offices here in Mostar and I would like to thank the OSCE for their hospitality. The team will continue to closely follow developments in Mostar and the Herzegovina region, and report to me of any issue which might arise.

Another sign of our continued commitment to Mostar is that I will be visiting – in my capacity as EUSR – this city very soon again, in just 2 weeks in the framework of my municipal outreach campaign.

Second, the responsibility for taking this city and this region (kraj) forward is in your hands. Neither OHR nor any other international agency can do this for you. As I have said, I will not allow the situation to be driven backwards, but whether it goes forwards is entirely in your hands.

Now is the time for positive leadership, real dialogue,

And this is why I said at the start of my speech that today is not about OHR, it is about your Mostar, your Herzegovina, it is about your future and the future of your region (kraj).

Earlier today, I donated equipment to two local schools here in Mostar. Our hope is that these donations will make a small contribution to improving students' lives, and that in time they will in turn make their contribution to building towards a brighter future for Mostar, for the Herzegovina region, and for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This future is in *your* hands.

So I say to you, aim high, reach out across administrative, political and ethnic divides and work together to take this city and this region (kraj) forward.

You can do it!

Thank you.