

Speech by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Wolfgang Petritsch, at the EU's Summit on the Balkans

President Mesic, President Chirac, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Only a few weeks ago, not many of us here today thought such a summit was possible. It is fitting that we meet here in Zagreb.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the lead Croatia has taken in setting a new course – and new democratic standards – for the region.

The extraordinary changes begun in Croatia earlier this year were followed by the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic, the main obstacle to a lasting peace in south-eastern Europe.

But all of us – regional and international players – still have much hard work to do to win the peace. Nowhere is this more so than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country most badly wounded in the last decade and a state which remains central to stability in south-eastern Europe.

To heal those wounds, Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbours, its international sponsors and above all, Bosnia's political class and its citizens, must move on from a minimum to a maximum implementation of the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords. International aid to the region must be conditional on this.

As we know, Croatia's and Yugoslavia's former leaders were

intent on dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina, fuelling the criminal politics of "ethnic cleansing".

The end of Croatian aid to hard-line nationalist elements inside Bosnia and Herzegovina has greatly contributed to stability in the country, whatever the recent demagoguery by some Bosnian Croat leaders.

I hope the changes in FRY will mean an end to similar support from Belgrade to hard-line Serb elements in Bosnia. I applaud President Kostunica for his decision to come to Sarajevo so soon after taking office.

I am happy to confirm, after meeting Yugoslav Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic on Wednesday, that Belgrade is determined to respect fully the territorial integrity of its neighbours. I have urged Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish diplomatic relations as soon as possible.

Let me state clearly: the redrawing of borders in south-eastern Europe only guarantees bloodshed. We must work with what we have.

The quicker rule of law and economic integration occurs in south-eastern Europe, the quicker the countries of the region will join the European Union. That means working together for a common aim.

Despite the dramatic television footage from Belgrade, the International Community must keep focused on its efforts to help rebuild shattered Bosnia and Herzegovina. Much aid money has already been spent. To bale out of Bosnia now, with the job half done, would be to throw away that investment. My office, the OHR, stands ready to continue to lead the international efforts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is, more so than its neighbours, a multi-ethnic state. The wounds left by the wars of the 1990s were far deeper. Bosnia is stable but still requires a

shoulder to lean on.

With the reassuring work of the Nato-led peacekeeping force SFOR, the United Nations, the OSCE and the OHR, refugee return is now a reality. Tomorrow, for example, 50 Bosniak families plan to return to the eastern Bosnian town of Foca, the site of horrific rape camps run by Serb paramilitaries during the war.

Religious buildings are being rebuilt in areas once torched or dynamited by paramilitaries. A monument to the victims of Srebrenica will be built, to make certain this massacre is never forgotten.

But if Bosnia's citizens are to truly confront the past, if a dangerous culture of impunity is to be avoided, the big-name indicted war criminals must stand trial in The Hague.

The detentions of those responsible for war crimes like former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander, Ratko Mladic, both wanted on genocide charges, are long overdue.

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Above all, any sustained revival for Bosnia and Herzegovina depends on its people.

General elections on 11 November confirmed the slow decline in support for nationalist parties. But the results, against the backdrop of raised expectations following the changes in Croatia and Yugoslavia, failed to dazzle.

It is very important that all Bosnians – particularly their political leaders – realise they face tough competition for less and less international aid.

The newly elected authorities must work painfully hard if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to catch up with its neighbours. The

rewards are there – membership of the Council of Europe and a feasibility study for an EU Stabilisation and Association Agreement to put Bosnia and Herzegovina on the road to EU accession.

The state committed itself in April to a list of 18 conditions it needs to meet in order to start this feasibility study. But to date, the European Commission estimates that Bosnia has only partially complied with just half of the 18 steps on this so-called “Road Map”.

Important issues for any country’s state-building process are still missing: an election law, a civil service law, a single internal economic space, just to mention a few.

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s leaders must take the Road Map and learn to read it. I expect them to meet the challenge of the mid-2001 deadline called for in today’s declaration. As the High Representative I can impose laws. But I cannot “impose” Bosnia into Europe.

My plea comes with a warning. I will not hesitate to act swiftly against those who obstruct the implementation of Dayton and the commitments since then, notably the PIC Brussels Documents of this past May. The International Community can have no patience with the outdated rhetoric of fear which brought this region to a bloody standstill.

In a welcome and generous gesture, the Croatian government has promised to help rebuild Mostar’s Old Bridge. We must, all of us, build bridges between south-eastern Europe’s wounded communities. This requires hard work, patience and a clear understanding of what is, and what is not, acceptable – from us all.

Thank you very much for listening