

Speech by the Senior Deputy HR Peter Bas-Backer to the Opening Session of the Interparliamentary Meeting

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you today.

This is a crucial time in the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina , as the country moves from the Dayton framework into a structure established and owned in BiH and oriented towards Euro-Atlantic structures. And at the core of this process is an evolving and vibrant parliamentary culture increasingly sustained by a robust and generally constructive spirit of popular debate.

The citizens of BiH are attending to their own business and doing so in the context of political stabilisation and economic recovery. The focus now must be on supporting this positive trend and where possible enhancing it. One of our key tasks in this process is to oversee the end of the OHR and the full establishment of the EUSR office. In the view of the High Representative the end of the OHR should also mean the end of the special executive powers – the so-called Bonn Powers. However, it will be up to the Peace Implementation Council to decide when the OHR can close down and transit into an EUSR-led mission.

Nevertheless we hope that this transition can occur in the first or second quarter of 2007, although this will depend on a number of factors. Most importantly, it will depend on the extent of the progress made this year by Bosnia and Herzegovina in continuing with the reform agenda and the progress made in the SAA negotiations.

However, in order to achieve a successful transition, an important principle is at stake: ownership. This goes to the heart of the mandate of the current High Representative.

The principle of ownership refers to the need for Bosnia and Herzegovina to assume its full responsibilities as a 'normal' European democratic State.

But it also refers to the approach of the International Community: our approach must change in order to allow a democratic political culture to develop that will be sustainable in the long term. There can be no sustainability without ownership.

This is easier said than done. Indeed, there will be temptations for the International Community to act and intervene in order to ensure short-term gains. These are likely to increase rather than decrease as we move towards completion of present reforms. But it is at this very stage that such reactions and interventions can no longer be compatible with the long-term development of an independent and sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina on the road to Europe.

This means we have to stand back and allow the BiH authorities to take decisions, when previously we would have acted and directed the process.. Ownership in decision making will make such BiH decision making more sustainable. Standing back of the IC now will provide us information on how sustainable the BiH decision making is by the time OHR fully transforms into EUSR.

Just in the last few days the parliament of BiH, by a narrow margin and after months of detailed and constructive debate, failed to endorse a package of constitutional changes that would have equipped the BiH authorities to serve citizens more efficiently and would also have equipped the country to meet the demands of EU integration, particularly the very strenuous legislative demands. The International Community argued

vigorously and with one voice in favour of the constitutional amendments. The International Community stands ready to offer its support when the issue of constitutional reform is taken up again – and it must be addressed if BiH is to progress further and faster along the road to European integration – but it is now up to the citizens of BiH to consider this new situation and to make up their minds about how their political representatives acted, about constitutional reforms and other reforms and to express their views at the elections. This, too, is a matter of ownership.

At the general elections in October of this year the people of BiH will for the first time vote for leaders who will have full responsibility for governing their own country. There will in future be no safety net from the International Community to step in when there are problems. This is how democracy gives ownership to voters.

Meanwhile, the negotiations on an SAA agreement are proceeding – and here, I believe, we can see very positive and very heartening evidence that the BiH authorities are showing that they have the professionalism and the capability to negotiate constructively and effectively with their European partners.

With these SAA negotiations BiH is now firmly on track towards Europe. BiH has expressed its intention to conclude the negotiations within a year. This is not unrealistic, but still much rather fundamental ground needs to be covered. The speed of BiH's progress in the negotiations will depend on the ability of the country's political representatives and institutions to meet the requirements set by the European Commission. Concrete progress will have to be made in developing BiH's legislative framework and administrative capacity. A matter of great importance is the implementation of police restructuring in compliance with the Political Agreement on Police Restructuring of October 2005. Furthermore the public broadcasting legislation needs to be adopted and

implemented and we expect full cooperation with the ICTY.

The High Representative, Dr Christain Schwarz Schilling, is personally committed to two additional topics on which he intends to engage with renewed focus during his mandate:

– the economy, and education.

Serious progress is required on both if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to offer a better and more prosperous future for its citizens, and young people in particular.

Sound economic development is the prerequisite for a stable democratic process and a sustainable future for the country.

We see great economic potential in BiH. There is annual growth of more than five percent and scope for significant development in key industrial sectors, but greater trade and investment are vital to allow the country to stand on her own two feet economically.

Moreover, we have a responsibility to create favourable conditions for the economy to prosper. We cannot encourage economic development on the one hand, but impose restrictive visa regimes on the other. OHR/EUSR is therefore lobbying EU Member States on the question of visa facilitation for BiH citizens (EU Ministers of Interior discuss this 4 May in Vienna).

Every healthy economy needs high standards of education. Here lies the key to a brighter future for Bosnia and Herzegovina and to reconciliation for future generations. The youth of the country represent its future, but under present circumstances they are ill served. The young people of BiH are entitled to higher standards of education and, at the very least, to the recognition of their certificates throughout the European Union in order to be competitive alongside their future European partners. The division of the BiH education system along ethnic lines must end. The government must create an

education system accessible to all, including Roma- and returnee-children. One school building having two main entrances for different ethnicities, with two staffs, two managements, two curricula etc. is not acceptable after accession to the Council of Europe and its post- accession obligations.

Finally, let me say a few words on Human Rights and Justice.

Firstly one of the most important outstanding issues from the postwar period – ICTY cooperation:

The BiH authorities have not yet resolved the issue of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to ensure that the remaining fugitives, chiefly Mladic and Karadzic, are delivered to The Hague . Bosnia and Herzegovina 's advancement towards Partnership for Peace and NATO structures requires concrete results.

We saw good progress in 2005. But we have not yet seen the same kind of progress in 2006. This is not acceptable and the International Community is firm on this issue. Until the remaining ICTY issues have been resolved, Bosnia and Herzegovina and others in the region will not be able to take the final steps towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Secondly: the rights of the individual here do not yet get the recognition and protection they deserve and need for a truly democratic society. Individual capacities still carry less weight here vis a vis collective values, when it comes to finding a job, finding education for children, healthcare in some places. This Human Rights – deficit still in too many cases determines a decision of a DP/refugee family not to return to its place of origin.

Let me to conclude:

BiH has come a long way since the Dayton Peace Agreement – now well over 10 years ago. The post war reconstruction and

reconciliation has not been an easy one, with much interference of the International Community politically as well as financially. But I am confident Bosnia and Herzegovina is on the right track: differences between various different constituencies remain as is usual in an open society; a broad and inclusive debate must now start and focus mainly on the future. The International Community – and in particular the EU – will continue to assist in this process. But the time has now also come for the BiH authorities to assume full ownership and responsibility for the future of this beautiful country.

Let the BiH citizens use their most important individual right, the right to vote, to make a real difference.

Thank you.