

Statement by the High Representative at a Press Conference Marking the End of the Vlasic Negotiations

BiH's road to Europe will be long and tough – but we took a giant step on that road at Vlasic over the last four days.

But more than that, what we saw at Vlasic over the last few days was a glimpse of the future.

If you want to know what Bosnia and Herzegovina will be like as a truly sovereign state, you only need to have been in the conference room of the Hotel Pahuljica.

These negotiations were, undertaken entirely by the leaders of your political parties, those in government and those in opposition and under the guidance of my distinguished co-chair, Adnan Terzic.

The International Community's role was simply that of facilitator.

What was achieved was the first stage of what I believe has the potential to become a historic agreement, not just for what was agreed but also for how it was done. This is an agreement whose exclusive label is "Made in BiH", not made by the international community.

These talks would have failed at this first stage if it had not been for the political leadership and courage was shown by the of government and opposition party leaders at Vlasic who were prepared even to put their own future at risk in order to give the country a future.

Almost without exception what we saw was compromise and statesmanship. What we saw was real leadership and not just party leadership.

As usual some on the fringes will grumble.

Well hear that familiar cry from the past: A cry of betrayal. You will hear it from Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats. You will hear it from Banja Luka , from Sarajevo and from Mostar

This too is politics, but it is small politics. It's the politics that always puts 'me' before 'us'. It's the politics of the past.

What we saw at Vlasic was big politics. The only politics that can give this country a future. The politics that puts the country first.

But let me point out that this is no victory speech. The second phase of this two-step process will now need to be finalized – as you've heard, the negotiations were conducted on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

So, we have some way to go yet before this is finalised. The second stage – the stage of the maps – will be tough too. But I have no doubt that if the spirit of Vlasic prevails, this can be done – and will be done.

The final Political agreement must be ratified in both Entity parliaments before the EU Consultative Task Force makes it's final Decision in mid-June.

But having come so far to fall at the final hurdle would be the greatest tragedy. I don't believe that will happen. Success means that BiH could start negotiations for it's own Stabilisation and Association Agreement by June this year.

I have been in politics a long time, so I am not easily impressed. But I was impressed by what I saw at Vlasic, and

any foreign observer of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Brussels or Washington or any other capital ought to be impressed too.