Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina at the South Eastern European Security on the Eve of the 21st Century – Conference organised by CSES

Bosnia and Herzegovina – six years after Dayton

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To try and sketch briefly Bosnia and Herzegovina's place in the complex jigsaw of Balkan security is daunting. It's a bit like the childhood game of creating a survival kit the size of a matchbox or having to choose only three items you would take with you to a desert island.

But the need for focus and the importance of knowing what to leave out are essential for the tangled skeins of peacekeeping in South Eastern Europe. So I thank the organisers of this conference for giving me this opportunity to concentrate my own mind!

In the sixth year of implementing the Dayton Peace Accords, it might be wise to look at where Bosnia and Herzegovina has got to before I map out where I think this country ought to be.

You can drive from one end of the country to the other without being stopped by drunken paramilitaries. We finally have people in office – at both State and Entity le– at both State

and Entity level – whose aim is to make the Dayton Accords work rather than working against them. Refugees and displaced people are returning to their homes in numbers which, although far from the figures we should be seeing, are significant enough to say that the returns logjam has finally broken.

In the first three months of this year, more than 15,000 minority returns were registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, double the number in the same period last year. Organisations such as Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group – usually sparing with their praise – have commended the tough property laws I put in place in 1999 to depoliticise the return issue, making it instead an issue of rule of law. Human Rights Watch in its Bosnia report has called the year 2000 a "break through" in refugee returns.

Along with returns and the strengthening of functional and efficient state institutions which serve their citizens, the third essential item for our Bosnia survival kit is economic reform. After too many years being sidetracked by outdated nationalist political issues, Bosnia and Herzegovina is concentrating on pushing market reforms. The five billion dollars for reconstruction earmarked at Dayton has almost all been spent and there is not much money following it. The country now must move on from an aid driven to an investment driven economy. Whatevetever the terrible wounds left by the war, Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens have woken up to the need for economic revival, to try and catch up with other Eastern European countries which have had a ten-year head start.

What have these three issues – returns, functioning institutions and economics – have to do with security?

I would say, everything.

Don't get me wrong. The recent ugly and well-organised mob that tried to stop my audit of Hercegovacka Banka in the

country's mainly Croat areas and the abhorrent violence meted out by Serb extremists at ceremonies to rebuild mosques in Trebinje and Banja Luka show that the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains as essential now as it was when it first deployed. The number of soldiers now serving with SFOR – at 20,000, about a third of the original force – are the absolute minimum with which we can keep the peace. Contributing countries should not kid themselves about any quick exit.

But a peacekeeping force is not the long-term answer to an enduring peace in Bosnia. Peace will only come if we can persuade enough Bosnian citizens that war would not break out tomorrow if the peacekeepers left. The three constituent peoples, the citizens of BiH, have to believe they have some kind of a future in a country which is, in so many ways, still deeply divided. They need to need to see something that works.

So what works? "What," to steal a phrase from Monty Python's Life of Brian, "have the Romans ever done for us?"

Well, the property laws work. A single economic space, with governments from both entities working to harmonise tax laws, is being created in the wake of Bosnia's all important freedom of movement, guaranteed for the most part by anonymous vehicle registration plates, not by NATO peacekeepers. The economy is facing a shake up which will rid the country of parasitic nationalist monopolies like telecoms, with benefits felt in people's pockets almost immediately. The cost of borrowing has fallen from 30 percent to 10 percent since I closed the Communist-era Payment Bureaux at the end of last year. The new Prime Minister, Bozidar Matic, has aligned his political priorities with those of ordinary voters: job creation; less red tape for businesses; a crack down on corruption; a decent education for their kids. The last – education – has particular import as a recent UNDP survey showed a staggering 62 percent of Bosnia's youth would leave the country if they had the chance: something for EU immigration officials to

ponder.

This desire to leave underlines what voters really want. They want the same prosperity and stability guaranteed by rule of law they have seen in Western Europe. And this, Ladies and Gentlementlemen, is the key not only to Bosnia's but the whole region's security: the dream of Europe.

If there is one thing that everyone in the ethnically, socially, politically fractured region of South Eastern Europe can agree on, it is the desire for membership of the European Union. The conditions for membership are the strongest means we have of establishing an enduring peace and security. Slovenia is already well on its way to EU membership. Croatia, earlier this week, signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in Brussels. Croatia's President Stipe Mesic and Prime Minister Ivica Racan have moved forward with speed and determination to co-operate with the war crimes tribunal in The Hague and make Croatia a country its neighbours can do business with. Croatia has given up trying to carve up Bosnia and is instead a valuable partner in Dayton implementation. Thus the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is well deserved.

Bosnia too has a chance to get into Europe and again, Matic's new government is determined to move closer to European structures. Also, the rapporteur to the Council of Europe's political committee, Laszlo Surjan, agreed with me this week that Bosnia is close to meeting the accession criteria for membership of the Council.

This is all good, upbeat stuff but I am under no illusion as to the obstacles we still faill face in making the dream of Europe a reality for Bosnia and Herzegovina's war weary citizens. While the main actors in the Bosnian war have gone, the corrosive and cynical nationalism of people like Milosevic or Tudjman is still felt. It is felt in the intimidatory tactics used against journalists, moderate politicians,

soldiers and policemen – and my own staff – by a small group of Bosnian Croat nationalists who want to tear up the Dayton Accords and demand "Croat Self-rule". It is felt by the Bosniaks attacked by an extremist Serb mob as they tried to lay the foundation stones to rebuild mosques in Trebinje and Banja Luka destroyed during the war. It is felt every day that Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic remain at large.

Even more pernicious is the decision by nationalist leaders – both inside and outside Bosnia – to simply stand by and watch. What can you say about a "leader" like Ante Jelavic who thinks trashing our attempts to build a civic society is a vote winner? What can you say about a "leader" like Mirko Sarovic who for too long refused to publicly condemn violence against refugees?

The region's nationalists are still peddling an ideology – the ideology of ethnic exclusivity – which has time and again shown itself completely incapable of guaranteeing stability in the region. It failed at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. It failed led at Versailles in 1919. It failed during World War Two. It failed in the 1990s.

There is still, five years after the war in Bosnia, enough residual fear and doubt as to the viability of Bosnia as a state to give the nationalists' a toe-hold in the country's political life. And they are trying to hang on like grim death. But what they are not telling their voters – and what their voters are beginning to realise – is that to cast a ballot or fire a bullet for these people is to cut themselves off from Europe. The EU has strict laws on non-discrimination in the classroom, for instance, and if Bosnia doesn't meet these standards, maintaining an apartheid education system, then its too bad for Bosnia.

The people of this region – above all the Serbs – must face up to their past. And I am glad that this process has begun. The continued violence and threats against returnees in eastern

Bosnia shows this is far from being just an academic issue. Both FRY and RS must hunt down and hand over persons indicted for war crimes.

At the start of my time in Bosnia, I agreed fully with the poet William Butler Yeats, who wrote: “The best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” I no longer feel this. There is a strong enough core of Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens who want something better – who want to join Europe. The InThe International Community, Ladies and Gentlemen, must stop talking about an exit strategy from Bosnia and work on strengthening the entry strategy for Bosnia into Europe. This is the key to a secure and stable environment in South Eastern Europe. This is the contribution of Bosnia and Herzegovina – of its two entities – three constituent peoples – to a safer and more stable Europe.

Many thanks for listening!