

# Innovation imperative for the Balkans.

30.05.2002 / 00:00 CET

## **Crisis management and speeches are not enough.**

By Wolfgang Petritsch

IN AUSTRIA we have a saying: the Balkans start at the gates of Vienna. They should however start much further west, since the Balkans must be made an integral part of Europe - for the benefit of Europe.

Yet observing current European integration perspectives, one might gain the impression the region hardly constitutes a part of our continent.

Looking back at my five years in the Balkans, particularly the last three as the High Representative of the International Community for Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have closely followed Europe's engagement with the region. In recent years the EU has clearly raised its political profile. It has assumed a position of responsibility vis-à-vis the region, and in terms of financial contributions Europe is leading the way.

I have pushed hard to engage the EU and move Bosnia and Herzegovina forward on the road to Europe. For example, legislation now being introduced in Bosnia and Herzegovina has to comply with EU standards.

However, EU visibility is still restricted to crisis-management by Javier Solana in Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro, and to Chris Patten's political dialogue with leaders throughout the region. And that is not enough: the people of the Balkans must become engaged with Europe. Accession to the EU must now become the driving force of reform and stabilisation in the region. That should be the EU's political vision.

To be clear: if the problems of lawlessness and crime in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Balkan neighbours are not resolved in the region, there can be little doubt they will be exported to the EU - whether in the form of illegal immigration, organised crime or smuggling.

Capacity building to counter these ills at the source is the most cost-effective option - and one which will deliver long-lasting results.

The EU's decision to take over the international police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the police-reform process which is a part of that mission, is an important step in this process. But much more is needed.

It is up to the EU to seize the opportunity and take the political lead in guiding the countries of Southeast

Europe along the path to full membership. When the present round of enlargement is complete, the EU should focus efforts on integrating Southeast Europe.

In order to raise the EU's profile in the region and show its seriousness of purpose, the enlargement commissioner should become one of the principal points of contact between the EU and the region - a veritable Balkans commissioner. This would also mean broadening the scope of the EU's present engagement.

There is a need to push actively for the necessary reforms.

The Stabilisation and Association Process serves as a model for Europeanisation and represents the basis for reform in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Croatia and Macedonia have already signed such an agreement with the EU.

However, harmonising laws and establishing standards will not by themselves do the trick. Reform in Southeast Europe, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, still depends on outside pressure. The process is not yet self-sustaining.

The EU needs to consolidate the instruments it has already established - the Stabilisation and Association Process and the Stability Pact, for example - and incorporate them into a single, sustained and long-term effort to lead the region into Europe.

Models of this type of integration process already exist - the European Economic Space, for example.

Ultimately, if the EU is to take its proper position in the driving seat of Europeanisation in the Balkans, it must foster integration, enlargement and ultimately accession.

But for this, innovation is required; vision is imperative.

Wolfgang Petritsch stepped down as High Representative of the International Community for Bosnia and Herzegovina on 27 May.