



## What Can Go Right

Some of you might know that on 27 May I am stepping down as the High Representative of the International Community for Bosnia-Herzegovina, handing over to my successor, Lord Paddy Ashdown. So please forgive me if I am in a reflective mood. Over the last few weeks, I have looked back on the three tough years that I have spent in Bosnia-Herzegovina to see if anything has changed.

As Austria's ambassador to Belgrade and the European Union's special envoy during the war in Kosovo from 1998-99, I had plenty of opportunity to see "what went wrong in the Balkans". And I want to examine the important role played by the media, both by domestic and foreign international media, in the wars that have convulsed this troubled region.

But I also want to take you on a short tour of what has happened during my mandate in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country that suffered more than any other after the collapse of Josip Tito's Yugoslavia. For Bosnia-Herzegovina shows not only what went wrong in the Balkans, but what can also go right.

The destructive role the state-run media played in bringing war first to Slovenia, then Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and finally Yugoslavia, is well documented.

Ordinary people were prepared to see the most monstrous acts carried out as they were dressed up in hideous untruths pumped out by broadcasters and newspapers who followed the bidding of a Slobodan Milošević or Franjo Tuđman with alarming readiness. The drivel I had to read and listen to from the pro-Milošević media in Belgrade was sickening.

My faith in that country's hopes of ever reforming were kept alive by precious islands of sanity such as the cartoons by Corax (he drew one of Milošević's wife, Mira, hanging paramilitaries on a Christmas tree). What



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also gave me hope were a few courageous print media, such as Danas - we have here today its co-founder and senior editor Radomir Ličina - which reported against the incoming tide of nationalism.

Living in a relative democracy, it is hard to believe that such obvious propaganda could ever have any effect on one. But it does. So many of my Serb friends found it difficult, after nearly a decade of disinformation, to know what to believe under Milošević.

It took my experience in Belgrade to understand how the character of Winston Smith, broken at the end of George Orwell's "1984", could be happy in the belief that two plus two equals five. Like an enzyme speeds up a chemical reaction many times over, so it was with many of the state-run media in the Balkans which stoked fires of ethnic hatred. As Orwell also wrote in his essay, "Notes on Nationalism", lies and untruths are essential in playing the ethnic card: "Nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception. Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also, since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself, unshakably certain of being right."

One of the tricks dictators use to fool their own citizens and visitors from outside is to swamp their states with radio and television stations and newspapers at both local and national levels, giving the appearance of a diverse civic society. For example, Bosnia-Herzegovina, when I arrived in 1999, still had close to 300 broadcasters.

This Babel of broadcasters and newspapers then systematically sets out to hijack the past to doubly disorient even the most discerning and cynical of readers. Orwell again: "Every nationalist is haunted by the belief that the past can be altered. He spends part of his time in this fantasy world in which things happen as they should... and he

will transfer fragments of this world to the history books wherever possible."

These concerns have been at the forefront of media reform in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This week, the news service of the public broadcasting service was launched. A station independent of state control run by Bosnians, Serbs and Croats, which will beam news and other programmes into homes across both entities. I believe the station will be crucial in helping reintegrate the country. Public broadcasting will promote, as far as possible, a critical exchange of ideas and information, which should help rid Bosnia of the lack of real information which has kept the fears of many citizens alive long after the war ended.

Fear and the ignorance needed to sustain it are the life force of nationalism. Again, Orwell saw this perfectly: "The general uncertainty as to what is really happening makes it easier to cling to lunatic beliefs. Since nothing is ever quite proved or disproved, the most unmistakable fact can be impudently denied."

The problems are different for the media in the established Western democracies. There it is convincing their - for the most part - well-off readers that they have a stake in a peaceful Balkans, Middle East, Afghanistan or wherever.

One private complaint among journalists covering the war in Kosovo was that ever-increasing body counts and larger massacres were needed to win space in their papers back home. And that in covering conflicts and unrest, there is seldom space or interest in what happens after the big networks have moved on to some other war. This is unhelpful in framing the debate on what action might or might not be taken by a reader's or listener's government.

This, as Orwell attests, is not a recent phenomenon: "The calamities



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that are constantly being reported - battles, massacres, famines, revolutions - tend to inspire in the average person a feeling of unreality." I think perhaps we have not succeeded, as international institutions, in communicating clearly where we have succeeded and where we have failed, earning only the distrust of the media.

A case in point might be the veteran Newsweek correspondent who covered the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and who wrote after the Dutch government's recent resignation over the Srebrenica massacre that nothing had changed much since the war's end, The main culprits for the massacre were still at large and most refugees had yet to return to their homes.

On the first point, I fully agree. The arrest of the Bosnian Serbs' wartime leader, Radovan Karadzic, and his military sidekick, Ratko Mladic, is long, long overdue. I had hoped to see them join their erstwhile "Godfather", Slobodan Milošević, to face the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Bosnians and Herzegovinians will never be able to look firmly into what is now, I believe, a bright future without dealing properly with its troubled recent past. But I disagree with the correspondent on refugee return. This, probably more than any other area in Bosnia-Herzegovina, shows that for all the international community's gross neglect at the beginning of the conflict, its eventual engagement after Dayton has brought results. I will speak of returns on the short tour of Bosnia-Herzegovina I promised earlier.

When I arrived to take up my post in Sarajevo in the summer of 1999, Milošević was bloodied but unbowed after his climb-down in Kosovo. He continued to pipe nationalist poison into the predominantly Serb entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The same poison, albeit with a different label, flowed in from the Croatia of Franjo Tudjman.

Implementation of Annex 7 of the Dayton Accords - the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced people to their homes, vital to redress the crimes of ethnic cleansing - looked impossible. The nationalist parties, surviving on that oxygen of ethnic fear, their corrupt elites reaping the benefits, meant a poor prognosis for the Bosnia-Herzegovina which had declared sovereignty in the dark days of 1992. The school of thought that professed Bosnia-Herzegovina to be suffering from "ancient hatreds syndrome" was, until only very recently, recommending a redrawing of the borders in the hope of a cheap, quick exit for the international community.

My predecessors as High Representatives, Carl Bildt and Carlos Westendorp, had extremely difficult immediate post-war pressures to deal with, but succeeded in setting up the institutions that the Dayton Peace Agreement envisaged. Many of the positive changes that have occurred since my arrival have come from outside as well as inside Bosnia-Herzegovina, notably the disappearance of the "Twin Peaks" of Balkan nationalism. Tudjman died and Milošević lives today in a prison cell. The presence, day in and day out, of international soldiers and civilian staff implementing Dayton also combined to overcome the politics of fear pedalled by the nationalists.

When I arrived, four years after Dayton was signed, the international community was looking for a clear strategy aimed at reaching the end goal of a self-sustainable Bosnia-Herzegovina in the not too distant future. My response was in two key areas.

Firstly, it was clear that we had to restructure our engagement by identifying and vigorously pursuing a number of core tasks, the pillars of the future self-sustainable Bosnia. I proposed three priorities. Accelerated refugee return to help undo the horrors of the

war and re-integrate the deeply divided country; a more robust approach to institution building, to turn Bosnia-Herzegovina into a functioning state that would be able to integrate into Europe; and economic reform as the engine to drive all this.

Secondly, we had to start giving back the country to its elected representatives and citizens. 50 years of Communism imposed from Belgrade, a deeply traumatising war and the Dayton Peace Agreement - an accord that was confusing as it produced no winners and no losers - had resulted in resignation and a general feeling that "the international community should fix it all".

This had to change to what I call "ownership", local responsibility. The Bosnians and Herzegovinians, the top officials as well as the ordinary person in the street, had to accept that Bosnia-Herzegovina was their country and ultimately their problem to solve. We were there to assist, but not to be in charge forever.

The first half of my mandate could be termed "highly interventionist". I used my powers to remove officials from office who were working against Dayton implementation. In late 1999, I removed more officials in one day (22 who were blocking returns) than my predecessor had during his entire mandate. I sent a clear message to the nationalist old guard that the Dayton Agreement was not simply a piece of paper to salve guilty Western consciences, but a living document which charted the way to a democratic, tolerant and multi-ethnic state in Europe.

There is a way to measure the success of the peace effort - through counting refugee returns. Up until 1999, the rate of return meant it would have taken decades to implement Annex 7. In particular, the RS Republika Srpska, was defending its mono-ethnic



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structure, having allowed only 10,000 Bosnian and Croats to return and scaring even those few with frequent violence.

Alongside the removal of officials, I began to impose new laws that got rid of legal loopholes in Bosnia's property laws; loopholes that prevented people from repossessing their pre-war homes; loopholes which directly benefited the architects of ethnic cleansing. Minority returns, that is, where a refugee or displaced person returns to an area where she or he is in a minority, leapt to 67,000 in 2000, increasing by another 36 per cent to 92,000 in 2001. If the current rate of refugee return continues, Annex 7 could be implemented in its entirety within four years. What seemed an impossibility in 1999 is now reality.

What greatly concerns me still is the lack of assistance provided for returnees to rebuild their homes. The domestic authorities give some help but this is far below what is needed. International assistance has declined sharply. We cannot allow returns to fail due to a lack of assistance.

The issue of jobs for returnees will be resolved once the economic situation improves. Bosnia has a steep hill to climb but the ingredients for economic recovery are in place, namely, a stable, single currency tied to the Euro; the privatisation process well underway; modern banking laws that have scrapped the corrupt, Communist-era monopolies on financial services that helped fund the nationalist parties; laws on standardisation so that Bosnia-Herzegovina can export goods to the rich markets of the European Union, which has waived duties and tariffs on Bosnian goods.

Today's Bosnia-Herzegovina clearly resembles a proper state. The State Government, the so-called Council of Ministers, grew from three to six ministries. I imposed a State Border Service

which intercepts smuggled goods and illegal immigrants. I established a State-level Court. Most of these achievements in state building are the work of the "Alliance for Change" coalition which, after the elections in 2000, replaced the nationalist parties at State level and in the Federation. In the RS, the SDS founded by Radovan Karadzic was still strong, but agreed to give the premiership to the reformist economist Mladen Ivanic.

The Alliance put serious economic reform on its agenda. It actively joined the global fight against terrorism after September 11, proving that Bosnia and Herzegovina was not willing to harbour terrorists. Firstly, as foreign minister and now as prime minister, Zlatko Lagumdzija, during his frequent visits abroad, presented a new Bosnia-Herzegovina, a state that wanted to be recognised as a responsible and independent player, not a "failed state".

This new found responsibility in Bosnia's politicians can also be measured. In the period from my arrival in 1999 to the formation of a working state government in March 2001, I made 146 Decisions, amending or imposing new laws and removing 56 obstructive officials from their posts. Since that time, I have issued only 60 Decisions and have removed only seven officials.

My last big intervention, perhaps the biggest during my mandate, was the removal in 2001 of Ante Jelavic from his post as the Croat member of the Presidency along with the dismissal of three other HDZ officials who had supported him in declaring "Croat self-rule" in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A few weeks later, I imposed the "Provisional Administration" on Hercegovacka Banka where dubious transactions were taking place. As it proved during an investigation, in which several of my staff were subject to violent attack, the bank would have been the financial backbone of "Croat self-rule."

The illegal and unconstitutional declaration of "Croat self-rule" has, in my term, been the greatest threat to the Dayton process. Thanks to our determined reaction, Jelavic had to publicly acknowledge the failure of this project at the HDZ Congress last October. He and the other individuals I removed gave up their party offices in order to allow the HDZ to register for the upcoming elections. I hope that a new and moderate HDZ will emerge from this process.

The powers vested in a High Representative make that official almost a benevolent dictator. This, I believed right from the start of my mandate, was in the short term necessary to uproot entrenched resistance and create the framework for democracy to work. But I knew in the long term it would work against the whole point of post-war international engagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, namely, to have the country stand on its own feet. Debate inside and outside my office constantly veered between those who would take a maximalist approach - impose everything and be done with it - and those who feared that robust action would kill civil society in an already weak state.

In my daily work, I had to take both paths. I believe that the robust interventions during the first half of my mandate were necessary to help the forward-looking forces surface.

But one piece of legislation that always got special treatment and consideration was Bosnia's Election Law. I believed it should never be imposed. Its passage or non-passage onto the statute book would be the yardstick measuring the ability of Bosnia's parties to find a compromise.

It was worth the wait. The Alliance for Change government passed the Election Law in August last year, paving the way for Bosnia's accession to the Council of Europe late last month, which is yet another milestone demon-



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strating the country's growing statehood and level of democratisation. And Bosnia-Herzegovina authorities are now organising their own elections slated for October 5.

But let me now tell you what I will always consider the ultimate proof that Bosnia-Herzegovina has entered a new era. This stems from the recent amendments of the Entity Constitutions. As you may know, the RS Constitution recognised only the Serbs as a constituent people, while the Federation Constitution only recognised Bosnians and Croats. In 2000, the Constitutional Court of BiH declared these provisions unconstitutional.

It took almost two years and then close to 100 hours of very hard negotiations under my auspices for the leading parties of Bosnia-Herzegovina to reach the so-called Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement of March 27, 2002, which served as the framework for the amendments. True, I had to complete the process because the SDA and HDZ prevented the necessary two-third majority

in the Federation, and the RS could not bring itself to accept three small details.

But the Alliance parties and the RS leadership had done most of the work on their own, thus acknowledging the necessity to negotiate a compromise. And the RS has accepted that it can no longer exclude Bosnians, Croats and other non-Serb citizens from its legislative, executive and judicial institutions and other decision-making process in this Entity.

This is of monumental importance. The ability to compromise is the essence of a democracy. Here it finally happened. And I am sure you realise what it means for the RS leadership to acknowledge that the RS cannot remain an exclusivist, mono-ethnic structure.

The effects of the amendments will reach into the lives of every Bosnia-Herzegovina citizen, turning the two Entities into multi-ethnic communities which guarantee full representation and input for all nationalities at every level of government and public administration.

I would say to the critics of international intervention that, yes, we do have our own interests, an interest in a stable Bosnia-Herzegovina, a stable Balkans which must be given every encouragement to join the European family of states.

We must hold out the highest expectations and hopes for our neighbours, for September 11 demonstrates only too well what happens if we turn our backs on poverty and injustice. George Soros is a hard-headed businessman but he sees all too clearly the perils of looking only at the bottom line, writing this month on globalisation, "We cannot build a global society without taking into account moral considerations."

International engagement works. Look at Bosnia-Herzegovina and you can see that for yourselves.

