



October 7, 2009

Mr. James B. Steinberg
Deputy Secretary
US Department of State
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Steinberg:

The coming EU and U.S. sponsored discussions in Sarajevo with the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina present an excellent opportunity to ameliorate the current situation in that country. However, if they are to prove fruitful, we believe that certain principles and objectives need to guide these discussions.

An underlying premise of the Dayton Agreement regarding the framework for B&H was that only through a loose federation of entities can stability be achieved. The Dayton Accords have thus successfully facilitated fifteen years of peace in the region, despite the brutality of the civil war, which they helped end. The success establishes the validity of this premise. Repeated attempts to erode that framework, or to otherwise disassemble the basic structure the Dayton Accords built, can only destabilize the still delicate ethnic reconciliation each and every time they occur.

The leadership of the Republic of Srpska, RS, has been pragmatic and focused on the realities and needs of the entity, providing relatively well for its constituency. The success of these RS policies is evident in the levels achieved in economic development, infrastructure projects and continued focus on internal needs. Its accomplishments outpace those of the federation despite having received disproportionately smaller financial support from the international community. The lack of similar achievements in the federation is not attributable to RS success or to the decentralized nature of the looser federation framework.

The decentralized governing framework for B&H has worked there as it does in many multi-ethnic countries around the world. Imposing more centralization arbitrarily for the sake of centralization can only impede and/or reverse the progress to date. Ongoing rhetoric attacking the RS and its institutions that is politically motivated is dangerous and has been counter-productive. It refuels ethnic conflict and thus undermines the Dayton Accords. International leadership is needed to focus B&H on steps necessary for progress, to eliminate arbitrary politicized decisions regarding further centralization and to prevent the continuation of the disruptive distractions so damaging to stability, .

Democratization of B&H requires the democratic participation of its people in the management of their own country. It has been almost 15 years since the war ended and true participatory democracy has not been realized. While institutions, election laws and other democratic structures and regulations have been set up, B&H has not been free to govern itself. It has been impeded in this progress by the authority of the Office of the High Representative, whose power is absolute and which power the OHR has too frequently exercised over all aspects of B&H, including the reversal of democratically determined actions and outcomes. This autocratic approach has usurped the authority of the democratically elected government impeding the ability of B&H officials from the Federal to the local level to perform their job and damaging their political credibility with constituents. Furthermore, ongoing interference has agitated all sides. This reality has effectively prevented maturation of democratization in B&H and impeded progress toward accession into the EU.

Democracy needs to be allowed to mature. It cannot do so with continuing interference from an overseeing international authority. That authority needs to be converted into an advisory one.

An essential step in solving the current crisis is to shut down the OHR and establish an alternative international advisory authority. Rather than the autocratic rule of the OHR, the international community should depend on an advisory oversight function from an international representation, such as an EU Special Representative to watch over B&H's accession.

The future of B&H lies with the people of B&H. While EU accession is an essential part of that future, the framework within which the people of B&H choose to govern their country cannot be imposed. A lasting solution can only be achieved with a mutual agreement within the leadership of B&H.

Deputy Secretary, we ask that you carefully consider these principles in the forthcoming meetings in Sarajevo.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mirjana Samardzija', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mirjana Samardzija
President