

Address by the President of the Republic of Croatia at the 11th session of Igman Initiative

Dear friends of the Igman Initiative,

Mr. Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Mr. President of Serbia and Montenegro,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

You have chosen the right issue at the right time for your agenda: Dayton ten years after. This is an issue which interests and must interest not only the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also the people in neighbouring countries and the greater region. And, of course, it attracts with reason the attention of the international community.

As the President of the Republic of Croatia, of a neighbouring country, I could certainly say a lot about the issue at hand. At the same time, I must resist the temptation of saying something that might be interpreted as interfering in internal affairs of another sovereign country. Therefore, I hope that you will understand and accept my somewhat unusual approach.

To wit, I shall specifically discuss past events and reserve my principled approach for a verbal consideration of what and how things could and should be done.

Let me deal first with what happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina ten years ago. I shall then share with you my thinking about the possible structure of the country - of any country - whose population includes members of several constituent peoples and which seeks, after the war and internal conflicts, a way out of a peculiar international protectorate towards full and true independence - in peace and stability.

The Dayton Agreement, signed ten years ago, was the outcome of the circumstances in which it was concluded but also the reflection of the power balance on the ground and of the degree of influence and interest shown by specific key factors on the international scene.

The Agreement was a compromise and hence not an ideal solution, but it was - let me stress - the only possible solution at the time. The goal which its architects had in mind was how to stop the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in that respect the Dayton Agreement was truly a great success. It stopped the war.

On the other hand, the Agreement laid the foundations of what became known as the Dayton structure of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, unfortunately, has not turned out to be a sufficient groundwork for the establishment of steady peace and durable stability. And that, in its turn, was the consequence of the fact that the Agreement, in order to establish peace, simply recognized and accepted certain upshots of the war and turned some of the war gains into facts of life. This has led to a unique situation in which the major protagonists of the aggressive war in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being indicted and sentenced by the Hague Tribunal while the results of the war for which they are being held accountable still survive on the ground.

But the Dayton Agreement was a compromise, as I have said; it reflected the power balance among the different players and the willingness of international factors to engage more energetically in the resolution of the conflict which many of them did not understand, at least not in time to prevent its spillover.

The vision expressed by the Agreement was focused on putting an end to the war, but not on establishing durable peace and stability, and that is its major shortcoming. In other words, the ostensible vision of future development was based on the acceptance of war gains and losses, and therefore precarious.

Let us ask ourselves: what are the current chances of progress towards internal stability if the international community should withdraw from Bosnia and Herzegovina - and I have in mind the withdrawal of military forces as well? I am afraid that we know the answer to that question and that, therefore, nobody thinks of demanding the withdrawal of foreign troops from Bosnia and Herzegovina, either in this country or in the region. But can that be the future of this country? I am certain it cannot. Because of that, we must find the strength and the honesty to admit, ten years after the Dayton Agreement, such as it is, has served its purpose.

The time has come to move on. But do not get me wrong. I am not talking about rejecting the Agreement. It is and it must remain the groundwork because it put an end to the war. However, today it should be upgraded, adapted to current and future requirements. If the situation ten years ago called for stopping the war, the current conditions calls for laying the foundations of a stable, truly democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina which will assume its own role in the transformation of Southeast Europe into an area of peace and security and secure its legitimate pursuit of membership in the European Union.

So much about specifics, although I may have dwelt on them too much. Yet, I consider it my duty to talk candidly, as befits the president of a neighbouring country but also as the president of the country which is the home of the Croats. Moreover, I think that I do not only have the right but also the duty to speak as a politician who resigned from his post and joined the opposition precisely because of the policy of his country towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the time I advocated the unified, sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I continue to advocate it.

Let us now turn to theoretical consideration. Let us consider a country, whatever its name or location, with three constituent peoples. These are not minorities but indigenous populations, peoples having a constituent capacity throughout the state although it is currently divided on an ethnic basis. The country experienced an internal war fomented and supported from the outside, from two neighbouring countries but also from the world.

The war involved forceful resettlement of the population and it created artificial, almost mono-ethnic territorial units. As the war came to an end and peace was imposed by the international community, so-called entities were created out of these units; at first they were given powers and a status which allowed them to behave like states within a state. Internal peace and stability in this country are maintained by foreign troops, the powers of central government bodies and institutions are small, and the ultimate arbiter in practically any

situation is the High Representative of the international community who, objectively speaking, has the status of a protector, not to use a stronger term.

This country has been living like that year by year. Some internal reforms are being enforced slowly, almost shyly, the concept of three armies in a single state is dying away, control of financial resources coming from abroad, including two neighbouring countries, is being enforced or at least attempted, a single customs and police force is being created. But there is an international agreement, which has recognized the war gains as facts and which is increasingly thwarting every deeper reform. What next?

In my opinion, in a situation where such a country is trying and must overcome profound division, including the one caused by war, the way out is not in any new divisions, least of all in ethnic divisions. First and foremost, the return of refugees and displaced persons should be enhanced - not just to any place but to their original homes. This would change the composition of the population to an extent where any divisions, including administrative ones, on ethnic grounds would become meaningless and utterly unfounded.

The key to the status of the members of the constituent peoples lies in their complete equality, but not in their ghettoization.

This implies complete opening up rather than parochialism.

As I see it, the solution in the state under consideration is to be found in the establishment of a civil society in which the internal organization of the state is purely of an administrative nature and in which nobody would claim his or her rights on the basis of ethnic background but exclusively on the basis of civil equality. Of course, such equality includes what we might conditionally call the right to specific ethnic features such as one's own language and script.

In order to have a sound foundation for stable life and development, such a state must radically leave past liabilities behind. In this regard, I think, the courage must be mustered, first and foremost within the three ethnic communities, to face the truth about the recent past. There must also be political will to punish the perpetrators of war crimes.

I mean all perpetrators of war crimes, and the ethnic background of specific perpetrators or of their victims should play absolutely no role. It is the crime and the criminal that must be punished.

Moreover, the climate of tolerance must be enhanced; every parochialism must be prevented, and models of coexistence in diversity not only offered but aggressively promoted through reliance on the young population. I am talking about a multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic environment: about its reinforcement where it is still present and about its re-establishment where there is none.

I am talking about unity in diversity, about the hallmark of united Europe which our imagined country wants to join.

Finally, after the implementation of internal reorganization along the suggested lines, the required powers should be given to the central bodies of the state - the parliament, the president and the government - along with the status of local government and self-government complying with European standards. The armed forces of the country shall be organized exclusively along defensive lines; the borders shall be watched by border policy under the authority of central government, and the police on the ground shall be geared to the requirements of the administrative units into which the country will be divided.

Our imagined country must be given help, through a network of political, economic and other bilateral relations, in promoting its maximum integration, first of all in its own region and then in united Europe. Possible radical phenomena of any colour or provenance should be prevented by strengthening democratic institutions and promoting the idea of democracy as well as, let me reiterate, by a spirit of comprehensive tolerance in which the freedom of one person shall never cross the boundary where it would jeopardize the freedom of others.

Is all that possible in the conditions I listed at the outset and considering the existence of an international agreement which is currently in the way of desirable evolution, however positive that agreement may have been when it was concluded?

I think it is possible.

Of course, the support of the international community is still required. Without it, any effort would hardly be possible in our imagined country under the present circumstances. However, such support must be focused on evolutive change rather than on freezing the current state of affairs.

This requires a precise sequence of events, an order for the gradual and systematic implementation of meaningful reforms. The process will also require an enlightenment campaign, let us call it that way, through which every and each citizen will be explained what is being done and why. Finally, the ultimate goal must be clearly defined, and that is the strengthening and stabilization of the state and its entry in the European Union, with an accurate definition of the advantages.

And the underlying messages should be: nothing is gained by war, and a future in peace cannot be built on war gains. The state to be built must be a state of all its citizens, open towards its neighbours, democratic and tolerant, a state which will be able to enter united Europe.

These have been my considerations about the possible development of an imaginary state which, I admit, bears a lot of resemblance to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I shall be pleased if anybody agrees that some of my ideas could be applicable here, in very specific conditions and in this specific state. I have presented them, trust me, as a sincere friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a convinced advocate of its survival and strengthening as a politician well aware that no stability is possible in our region without a stable and democratically organized Bosnia and Herzegovina.