

New Year Statement by High Representative

“The start of a New Year brings with it the sense of a new beginning. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina the onset of 2003 represents a real beginning, because the work undertaken in 2002 to consolidate long-standing reforms and launch new ones should now begin to bear fruit. In 2003 we start down the road that Hungary and Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe have just completed, to Europe. I am convinced that Bosnia and Herzegovina can do it. But I will not hide from you that the early part of this road to reform will be tough and difficult. For many things will have to get harder before they get better. The pace of change will have to speed up. BiH has to move very quickly from an aid dependent economy to an export driven one. We must replace the prospect of economic collapse with the prospect of economic viability and prosperity. We are competing with our neighbours for investment and jobs. Till now, they have been winning this competition and we have been losing it. We have little time to turn that around.

In 2003 I expect to see the governments and the civil service respond to the needs of BiH citizens. Politicians must work fast to eliminate job-destroying legislation and increase the pace of privatisation and get modern commercial laws onto the statute books; bureaucrats must help – not hinder – workers and entrepreneurs, as they start new companies and expand existing ones. This is a race against time.

In 2003 we have the means to turn Bosnia and Herzegovina around. There is no shortage of enterprise in this country; there is no shortage of skill; there is no shortage of a willingness to work hard. I believe this can be the year in which the hard work and good will of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina is rewarded with better times.”