



**Speech by RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanovic
at the
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**- Panel: Bosnia 30 years after Dayton -
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Moderator: Jean-Arnault Dérens

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Thirty years ago, a war in Europe was brought to an end. And it was ended here.

The settlement was negotiated under American leadership in Ohio and formally signed under French auspices here in Paris. That division of diplomatic labour reminds us of the world in which Dayton was possible and raises the uncomfortable question of whether such strategic coherence would be possible in the world we inhabit today.

The leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia signed what was, in one important sense, **the first binding regional bargain after Yugoslavia's violent dissolution**. It also gave a strong impulse to what led to the Stability Pact and, consequently, the RCC. That is why I am here today, both as SG of RCC and citizen of BiH, to witness from both sides what the Dayton and Paris Peace Agreement did and what it couldn't do.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's internal constitutional order was therefore **embedded in a regional peace settlement**. Regionally it opened an avenue for cooperation and internally it built metaphorically speaking **"un échafaudage" or "Scaffolding"**. Scaffolding is not a building. You raise it around a structure so the real construction can happen inside, and you take it down when the building can stand alone. The implementation architecture of Dayton reflected this logic.

The agreement stopped the killing, fixed territorial lines and created institutions capable of holding the country upright. It deferred questions that could not have been resolved in November 1995 without endangering the agreement itself.

Dayton brought back coexistence we have always had in Bosnia and Herzegovina and region through centuries; **but it did not bring about reconciliation**. These are not the same things. Coexistence is the absence of violence, though as such is the precondition for everything else. Reconciliation does not require everyone to remember the past identically. It requires a common factual and moral floor and the capacity to make different memories coexist within one political community. **That requires far more than a political agreement**. No treaty negotiated in three weeks between wartime leaderships has ever produced it, and it is not criticism of the negotiators to say so.

The treaty gives us the evidence itself. Dayton has **eleven annexes**. Our constitution is the fourth - one item on a list of practical arrangements.

Look at what became of those eleven, and a pattern appears that I find hard to unsee. **Annex 1-A** was implemented with extraordinary speed. Approximately sixty thousand NATO troops helped separate the former warring forces, heavy weapons were cantoned, and enforceable deadlines were met. **The core military task was delivered**.

Now the others. **Annex 7, the return of refugees and displaced people**. Property restitution largely succeeded: approximately two hundred thousand property disputes were resolved, but many people recovered their property without permanently returning to their pre-war communities. Thirty years later, the wider promise of Annex 7 remains incomplete. **Annex 9** envisaged joint public corporations capable of reconnecting the country economically. That integrative ambition was largely unrealized. Only one state-level corporation was established under the annex, and even that institution remains chronically underfunded.

Where the international mandate was clear, the task measurable, and enforcement backed by troops, deadlines and resources, DPPA's core objectives were largely delivered. Those requiring a sustained daily plebiscite and the responsibility of domestic political leadership **remain substantially unfinished**. I am not absolving anyone from the guilt, which is both international and domestic, **I am humbly pointing at a pattern**.

And speaking of facts, the truth is that there were serious attempts, particularly between 2000 and 2006, **when external leverage and domestic agreement briefly aligned**: the State Court, a single indirect-tax system, state-level law-enforcement institutions and, ultimately, unified Armed Forces.

What does this walk through the annexes tell us?

Dayton gave BiH every mechanism and could not give its people one important thing: a minimum constitutional loyalty to the common state. A sense that there is a political "we" whose survival matters more than the outcome of any dispute. *Un plébiscite de tous les jours* to paraphrase Ernest Renan, who gave his lecture here at the Sorbonne in 1882, indicating that functional nations are more than race, religion, language...

Bosnia and Herzegovina three decades after is not a country without a daily plebiscite. It is a country in which **several competing plebiscites take place simultaneously**, while the constitutional system provides too little space for their convergence into a common democratic

will. Citizens demonstrate coexistence in practical life, while our political system, including the leaderships citizens repeatedly elect, fragments and conditions that consent at the symbolic level.

No foreign power can hold that plebiscite on BiH's behalf. No treaty can cast the vote.

Not the negotiators in Ohio, not the signatories at the Élysée, not the High Representative, not the European Union. **The daily plebiscite belongs to all three constituent people and citizens of BiH.**

So what have we actually learned in thirty years?

First - and it is not a small thing - enforcement works. An agreement with troops, deadlines and money behind it does what it says it will do. So, the **best thing about Dayton's legacy is that it stopped the war.**

Second, external actors helped create dependency and domestic actors learned how to govern through it rather than replace it.

Third, an agreement can hold a structure upright. It can produce coexistence and the absence of violence. **But it cannot compel allegiance to a common cause and destiny.** Without domestic actors willing to hold that vote to define a minimum common denominator, a social contract, to build institutions they own there is no reconciliation and no cohesion.

Fourth, DPPA teaches us very important regional lessons as well. Fear must not simply be managed. It has to be cured, because managed fear easily becomes a political logic. It produces petrified narratives. **That is what must break before anything else can move.**

This is a key message to BiH three decades after DPPA, but it is also the message to the entire region. We should not wait to complete reconciliation before allowing citizens and businesses to benefit from cooperation. Functional cooperation is not the reward at the end of reconciliation, it is one of the instruments through which trust can gradually be built. Truth without cooperation becomes accusation. Cooperation without truth becomes theatre. BiH and the entire region need both. We at RCC recognize that very well and we try to work on that through every step on the way.

Thank you.