

Interview: The High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling: “Possible Suspension of Negotiations with the EU”

Deadlock in police reform represents the greatest problem – While advocating a more positive approach to BiH, Schwarz-Schilling gets backstabbed by irresponsible BiH politicians

Failure to adopt the amendments to the BiH Constitution and problems in police reform are sending a very negative message to the European Union, the High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, warned.

In an interview for “Dnevni avaz” Schwarz-Schilling also emphasized that the irresponsibility of domestic politicians undermines his efforts to help our country.

Visa facilitation

We talked with Mr. Schwarz-Schilling during the meeting of the EU Ministers of Interior and experts, on which they discussed, among other issues, the liberalisation of visa regime for the countries of the Western Balkans.

– I am trying to draw the attention of the participants to BiH, but also to other countries in the region. Unless we simplify the procedures for obtaining visas in these countries we will only cause delays and difficulties for economic development. Because economic development, on the rise in BiH, must be accompanied by free movement of people – Christian Schwarz-Schilling emphasised.

He indicated as an example the excellent quality of software produced in BiH, which cannot be found in Western markets because there are problems with sending personnel to service this software.

– If we want investment in BiH, if we want to support small and medium-sized companies, then it is essential that they get the same treatment in the European market as European companies get in BiH – the High Representative noted.

Asked what are the chances for the EU ministers accepting this line of argument, Schwarz-Schilling replied that they are already considering a proposal by the European Commission to liberalise the visa regime for intellectuals, students, artists, and separated families, but not for businesspeople, and that he is making every effort to include this category on the list of the “privileged.”

The High Representative commended the successes of our country with regard to protection of borders, general security and the fight against organised crime.

– In my opinion, there is no real reason to continue with the imposition of the current visa regime on BiH society – Schwarz-Schilling said.

Aggravating circumstances

However, the High Representative could not say when the implementation of a more liberal visa regime would begin, because “negotiations on this issue are just beginning.”

– I must say, however, that the events of last week and this week do not help BiH or my own efforts to facilitate the visa regime. First the parliamentarians rejected changes to the BiH Constitution, and now the police reform process is blocked. And while I am advocating a more positive approach to BiH, I get backstabbed. Europeans now say that the road of BiH is full of obstacles that they themselves create. Why should we

make it easier for them, when they make it more difficult for themselves – the High Representative noted.

According to him, the behaviour of BiH politicians has had the worst possible effect while he is trying to do something good for BiH citizens and companies.

– I can lobby, clarify, recommend. But the EU, and the European Commission in particular, are closely following everything that is happening in BiH right now, just like they did in the case of Serbia . I am indeed sad that BiH is not using this time to be the first in line for negotiations with the EU, but it is rather placing new obstacles in its own way – Schwarz-Schilling said.

He also pointed out that such behaviour would result in “very serious consequences, and there is nothing I can do if they continue making wrong decisions.”

Asked whether this means that the SAA negotiations with the EU will be suspended, the High Representative said that he does not foresee that possibility right now, but he also warned that BiH authorities at all levels must be aware of that possibility and know that someone will be held responsible if negotiations are suspended.

Dangerous halt

– I must admit that the reform process as a whole is in a dangerous situation. And there is nothing I can do about that. The BiH authorities must take this country’s destiny into their own hands. This cannot be delayed any longer. However, the BiH authorities must be ready to make the right decisions and accept credit for them, but also face sanctions for their mistakes.

The importance of elections

– I am pleased to see that almost everything is ready for the

upcoming elections. Problems with voter registration are almost entirely resolved now. Therefore, there is no possibility of postponing the elections for several weeks on account of that issue, which means that the process was successful and on the right track. I expect the highest possible turnout.