

High Representative's TV Address to Citizens of BiH

Good evening.

I am Christian Schwarz-Schilling. As most of you know, I have just succeeded Paddy Ashdown and I am now High Representative. I have visited Bosnia and Herzegovina many times since 1992, but from today I will live and work here together with you.

I look forward to living among friends.

This appointment is a great honour for me. It brings with it serious responsibilities, but also an opportunity to use my previous experience – as a politician, as an entrepreneur, and as an international mediator – to support you at a moment of crucial importance.

You are aware that I may be the last High Representative. This function and this office will disappear in the near future. This should not be a cause of concern. We should all embrace this change as a reflection of the fact that a new chapter has opened in this country's relationship with the wider world and in particular with the rest of Europe.

The termination of this office does not signal the end of international engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina . The future of this country lies in European and Euro-Atlantic integration. I will not leave the country when I cease to be High Representative. Instead, I will remain here as a Special Representative of the European Union, to help steer the integration processes.

It is true that Europe has not always done the right thing for this country. I am completely aware of this. Indeed, I resigned from the German government in

1992 in protest at our collective failure to halt the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I believed that half a century after the Second World War – when we pledged that genocide would never again be allowed to take place – we had abandoned this principle. In the face of ethnic cleansing and human suffering on an almost unprecedented scale, I decided that working for justice and peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was more important than my career as Minister for Posts and Telecommunications in Germany.

Since then I have become increasingly engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the war, I became involved in delivering humanitarian aid and offering my good offices. And in the final year of the war, I began working as an international mediator at a local level.

In this capacity, I spent ten years travelling to every part of this country – from Bihac to Bijeljina, from Derventa to Mostar – working with community leaders to foster dialogue and rebuild trust in such a way that ordinary people could reconstruct their lives.

I have seen how this country has changed since 1995. Anybody who has witnessed this transformation cannot but be impressed by it.

In the course of my mediation work, I have developed a deep respect for BiH citizens of all ethnicities, respect for your strength of mind and your capacity to overcome adversity. These are qualities you will have to draw on in the coming years as you take your destiny in your own hands.

During my tenure, the chances are that Bosnia and Herzegovina will sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union and join NATO's Partnership-for-Peace

programme.

These are key milestones on the road to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The steps that must be taken in order to reach these milestones are known – and these will form the agenda of my work.

But to take these steps, Bosnia and Herzegovina must be fully sovereign.

That means that I must step back.

As High Representative, I may have the authority to impose legislation, but I cannot impose reconciliation, and I cannot impose prosperity.

That is up to you and the leaders you will elect.

Elections are the crowning moment in any democracy. It is not the selection of the new High Representative but the choices of the voters of this country that will determine how this country will be governed.

Elections, later this year, are an opportunity to debate the way forward and to choose leaders who are best equipped to secure your country's European future. For they – not I – will be responsible for negotiating the terms and speed of your country's entry into Europe .

Those of us who experienced Europe 's darkest days and have since lived long enough to see the European Union grow to include countries that formerly

formed part of the Eastern bloc know how far and how fast it is possible to move when countries are on the right tracks.

Knowing this country and its people I have no doubt that this can work in the same way in Bosnia and Herzegovina .

Let us work together to build a common European future for

this country and its wonderful people.

Thank you.