

Christian Schwarz-Schilling: Blocking Reforms Could Delay Transition

Bosnia and Herzegovina's transition to full sovereignty will be determined by the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, not by the International Community, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, told a conference in Vienna today. At the same time, however, he warned that the closure of OHR in mid 2007 and the transition to a more normal engagement with the International Community are not a foregone conclusion.

Noting that the decision to close the OHR in the middle of next year will be reviewed when the Peace Implementation Council meets in February, the HR/EUSR stressed that: "This decision will take into account the overall situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If the Stabilisation and Association Agreement has not been signed and if important reforms are still blocked then that could have an impact on the closure of the OHR."

The HR/EUSR stressed that progress will have to be made on police and PBS reform, among other areas. He also pointed out that while constitutional change is not a requirement for completing the SAA negotiations, the creation of a more efficient government structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina is clearly in citizens' interests and will be necessary for further integration in European structures.

He argued that this substantive reform agenda can only be advanced if citizens hold their politicians to account: it is up to citizens – specifically to voters – not the International Community, to prevent BiH politicians from sabotaging the country's best chance to take a decisive step towards Europe.

"It is up to civil society to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina is stable and secure; it is up to civil society to take full responsibility," he said.

The HR/EUSR acknowledged that: "The International Community has itself become part of the problem, because the International Community's engagement has to some extent left no space for the BiH authorities to develop their own responsibilities or, indeed, to make mistakes," but he insisted that the International Community "is in Bosnia and Herzegovina to *help* the BiH authorities not to *direct* them."

The HR/EUSR was speaking at a conference organized by the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe. Following his speech, the HR/EUSR held meetings with Stability Pact Coordinator Erhard Busek and Austrian Justice Minister Karin Gastingger.

Tomorrow, in Brussels, the HR/EUSR will address the European Council's Political and Security Committee.