

Press Conference by the High Representative and EU Special Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for coming today.

This will be the last time that I have an opportunity to speak to you as High Representative and EU Special Representative.

Let me begin by thanking you for the cooperation you have given me during the past 17 months.

Many of you have been critical of me and criticised me in no uncertain terms. Well that's part of your job.

But I will say that I have found in this country a greater tendency than usual to manipulate and use lies publicly. The media should set a positive example of presenting the situation as it really is, and let others play their games.

When I took up my duties as High Representative and EU Special Representative in February last year I said

- I expected this country's political establishment to step forward and take full ownership for governing Bosnia and Herzegovina and setting it on the right path towards EU and

NATO integration.

- I would not intervene when not absolutely necessary, and that I would use the Bonn Powers strictly when required for issues relating to cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague and where the peace and stability of the country might be called into question.

I have done this, sometimes in the face of criticism, but I have always tried to be consistent in following this policy. I believe it has been the right policy and remains the right policy for the future.

I think we have learnt the following things:

- Some of the democratic institutions of this country do not yet function effectively and need to be made more efficient and effective.

- The bottom-up process has not been strong enough, and further efforts must be made to ensure that reform and functionality comes from the grass roots, as well as top-down. Civil society is growing and getting stronger – but it has a long way to go. This is vital for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a flourishing democracy.

- Certain key political leaders and elected politicians have been irresponsible in their actions, putting their own ambitions ahead of the wellbeing of all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The reality of the situation and the capability of the politicians of this country to make reforms necessary to progress towards Europe has been clear. Not enough progress has been made.

I had hoped that the transition to Europe and to an EUSR would come quicker, but this has not been the case. But this country

and its politicians cannot delay. It needs a Stabilisation and Association Agreement and has the capability to initial one in the coming months.

This reality is clearly reflected in the PIC Declaration last week. Both sides, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the international community, must work now to improve the situation step by step, still keeping a policy of ownership but doubling our efforts to make sure it happens in reality and moving away from empty or destructive rhetoric.

My successor, Miroslav Lajčák, is an enormously capable and dynamic individual. I am confident that he will be able to move forward, and that he will be able to do so by building on foundations that his other predecessors and I have laid together with the leaders of this country.

Although the current deadlock is a worrying situation, I believe that progress can be made in many areas with political will to move forward.

Indeed, in some areas, such as education, the deadlock already seems to be broken.

Three Education Laws (the Higher Education Law; the Law on Agency for Pre-Primary and Secondary Education; the Framework Law on Pre-School Education) have been adopted by the BiH House of Representatives and are pending adoption in the BiH House of Peoples, while the Framework Law on Vocational Training and Education has been adopted by the CoM and pending endorsement of the BiH HoR.

This is vital for the future of this country and the next generation.

It is important that progress is made on police reform in the immediate period. Political leaders have come very close on two occasions in the last few months – I call upon the party leaders to meet and finalise the details so that this

country's journey to Europe can get moving again.

Constitutional reform is now back on the agenda. Party leaders with whom I have spoken have come back to me with their comments on my draft paper about setting up a process. This will be extremely important for the future of this country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will resume its journey to Europe and has a lot to offer other countries in the European Union when it becomes a full member.

There has been some speculation about what I am going to do now. Well, I will take a vacation together with my family immediately after handing over to my successor on Monday. I am keeping my residence in Sarajevo for a period and I hope to visit regularly. Bosnia and Herzegovina has come to mean a great deal to me and I intend to remain engaged here in my own way.

Now, I'll be happy to take your questions.