

Schwarz-Schilling: Citizens Are Entitled to an Explanation



Desperately needed economic reforms cannot be enacted and implemented unless their purpose is properly explained to citizens, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling told a conference in Sarajevo today. He described economic reforms as “Cinderella” media issues, noting that reforms that affect the wellbeing of every man, woman and child in the country receive only cursory coverage in newspapers and on television compared to the exhaustive attention devoted to purely political issues.

“Unless we can explain to the general public what we propose to do to fix the economy, why we propose to do it and the benefits that can be expected as a result, citizens will continue to view the economic reform agenda with indifference or hostility,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling told politicians and economists attending a conference on economic and social development organised by the Austro-French Centre for European Rapprochement and the French Institute for International Relations.

“If we make all the progress we would like to make on resolving political questions, and at the same time we fail to fix the economy, then our overall effort will be in vain. Attracting investment, creating jobs and raising living

standards are basic conditions that must be met if the rehabilitation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to succeed," he said.

The High Representative/EU Special Representative highlighted a small number of key economic reforms that can bring rapid benefits to everyone – making the allocation of public funds more efficient and transparent, modernising Bosnia and Herzegovina's business law, strengthening the protection offered to small-deposit holders, freeing up the movement of companies and labour between the Entities, liberalising the telecom sector, getting the railway system properly up and running again, and establishing a state-level Social and Economic Council to generate productive dialogue that will make it easier for industry and trade to expand.

"None of these reforms should be politicised and each of them should be explained. The fact of the matter is that each of them will provide benefits, and when these benefits are identified and publicised it will be possible to sustain the political focus needed to turn proposals into government policy," he said.

Noting that "living standards are rising, but they are not rising nearly fast enough," Mr Schwarz-Schilling called for economic issues to be placed at the centre of public debate. "This is not just desirable; it is necessary," he said. "It is in fact a prerequisite for creating and sustaining a prosperous democracy in this country."

The [full text](#) of the High Representative and EU Special Representative's speech is available at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org