



Schwarz-Schilling: Countries Cannot Simply Stand Still

This week, the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina received a wake-up call from European Commissioner Olli Rehn who told them in a letter to Prime Minister Nikola Spirić they were leading their country down the wrong road, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote today in his weekly newspaper column.

“There is a mistaken belief – dangerously common among some of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s leaders – that when the country isn’t moving forward it is standing still. For a few months, they seem to think, we can stop making progress on getting into Europe, on creating jobs, on improving government services – and after doing nothing for a while, once we’ve got our political act together, we can take up where we left off,” he wrote in the article that appeared in *Dnevni avaz*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Večernji list*, pointing out that things don’t work like that in the real world and that when a country stops moving forward it starts moving backwards.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling contrasted the speed with which the Central European states that successfully joined the European Union moved forward with the absence of progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“The real tragedy,” the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote, “is that success in taking the next step to Europe, success in attracting investment, creating jobs and raising living standards, success in securing police reform and other measures required to unblock the road forward – success in all these areas is tantalisingly close, as Commissioner Rehn also made clear this week when he pointed out that ‘a bright European future’ is within reach for Bosnia and Herzegovina – but only if its leaders reach out and seize that future.”

Yesterday in Zagreb, the other countries in the region, nevertheless, delivered a vote of confidence in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s future when they agreed to locate the Secretariat of the new Regional Cooperation Council (which will take over from the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe) in Sarajevo. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Ministers responsible for regional cooperation, diplomats and senior civil servants have all worked hard and effectively to bring about this result. It will place Bosnia and Herzegovina where it belongs, in the very heart of the region.

“This is something I lobbied for even before I became High Representative. It is also a move that should serve as a much needed reminder that moving forward is infinitely better than moving backward,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote.

“The main problem in recent months is that too many politicians seem to have thought that they had the luxury of standing still, the High Representative and EU Special Representative concluded.

The text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative’s weekly column can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.