

Schwarz-Schilling: Police Restructuring Opportunity Must Be Seized



A deal on police restructuring that was very nearly accepted by key leaders last month remains on the table and the opportunity that this presents for Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to be seized, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling said in a speech today.

“The prospects of this country will be considerably better the day that a Stabilisation and Association Agreement is signed,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling told a conference organised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, adding that: “The major obstacle – though not the only obstacle – to the signing of that Agreement is the issue of police restructuring.”

The conference, entitled *50 Years of the Rome Treaties and the Future of the Western Balkans*, took place at Residence Konak in Sarajevo.

In a wide-ranging speech, the High Representative and EU Special Representative compared the situation in Europe in 1957 to that of today in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“The European Union has evolved in part as a result of war, as well as economic and social breakdown,” he said. “This fact has a direct bearing on the efforts of the peoples of the Western Balkans to draw closer to the European Union and in due course to become members.

"The message should also be clear to everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina ," Mr Schwarz-Schilling continued. "Twelve years after the end of the conflict here, the citizens and leaders of this country face many of the challenges and choices faced by the citizens of Europe in 1957 – twelve years after the end of the Second World War."

The High Representative and EU Special Representative pointed out that some people seem to believe that the country is not up to integrating itself in Europe because of continuing disagreements, distrust and recrimination that are a by-product of war.

"These people are probably too young to remember the distrust and recrimination in the rest of Europe after the war of 1939 to 1945," he continued. "I'm not. I was a young man in 1957 and remember well how Europe still suffered from the bitterness and dislocation spawned by the Second World War.

"Despite this, the statesmen who launched the European Union half a century ago were able to see beyond their immediate difficulties to the prospect of a prosperous and secure future. That's what the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina have to do today."

The High Representative and EU Special Representative pointed out that the success of the European Union was not pre-ordained and had been a remarkable story of triumph being extracted from adversity.

"Back in 1957, the prevailing mood in Europe was gloomy," he said. "Essential items were still rationed; medical and social services were basic; poverty was endemic; and citizens lived in fear that the end of the Second World War in 1945 had been a remission in rather than a conclusion to the continent's recurring instability and conflict."

Mr Schwarz-Schilling pointed out that his country, Germany, was divided, that Europe was divided into two heavily armed

military blocks, and that just four months earlier, Soviet tanks had crushed the Hungarian uprising.

“Half a century on, I have no doubt that the signatories of the Treaty of Rome would be amazed by the success of their initiative,” he told the conference, adding that the Treaty of Rome was significant, above all, “because it heralded a break with the past”.

“Twelve years after the greatest conflict in the history of humankind, former belligerents chose to put aside their differences for the future of the next generation,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling said, adding that: “That decision transformed the prospects of an entire continent, not only the fortunes of the six founding members. And that decision continues to have the potential to transform those parts of Europe that remain outside the European Union.”

The High Representative and EU Special Representative made clear that the European Union was not an exclusive club. “It is an inclusive community of nations that have overcome, and continue to overcome, enormous obstacles in order to build prosperous and democratic societies,” he said.

“In the course of 50 years, it has grown from a community of six nations to one of 27, Mr Schwarz-Schilling continued. “In the process, it has helped unify what had been a divided continent, bringing in countries from what used to be known as Eastern Europe, including Slovenia in 2004 and Bulgaria and Romania at the beginning of this year.”

The High Representative and EU Special Representative pointed out that the European Union now stretches from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and completely surrounds the Western Balkans, which are “geographically, culturally, politically, economically and socially clearly within the European family”.

He also pointed out that the European Union would play an

ever-greater role in all the countries of the Western Balkans in the coming years. "The European Union has already and repeatedly made a commitment to all countries of the region that they too can look forward to the prospect of full integration into its structures, if and when they meet key political and economic conditions," he said.

"In spite of a certain enlargement fatigue in some member states in recent years, the European Union's commitment to the Western Balkans remains strong," Mr Schwarz-Schilling continued. "After all, the issue is not so much that of EU enlargement as of a filling out of the European Union."

Croatia should be a member of the European Union within a couple of years; Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are also now travelling down the road to membership; and Montenegro, too, is clearly heading in the same direction, he told the conference.

"Only Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are yet to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union," the High Representative and EU Special Representative said.