



Schwarz-Schilling: Diaspora a National Asset that BiH Should Make the Most of

Although Bosnia and Herzegovina's Diaspora was created in appalling circumstances, it represents a national asset and the country should make the most of it, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in his weekly column, which appeared today.

"When members of the Diaspora return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, they bring enormous benefits to this country – including skills, capital and knowledge of overseas markets and business opportunities," Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote in *Dnevni avaz*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Večernji list*.

According to figures released by the Foreign Ministry this week, some 1,343,805 citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are currently living abroad. Of these, more than 800,000 live in other parts of Europe, and nearly half a million are resident in the United States and Canada.

"Some have built new lives in their country of refuge and no longer wish to come home," the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote. "That is their right. Others would return, but they face daunting challenges."

Challenges facing returnees include reintegration into a social-services system that is haphazard and inefficient and the antiquated business environment, which is directly responsible for the small number of new jobs and investment opportunities being created.

"Despite these difficulties, many members of the Diaspora still wish to come home," Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote. "At the same time, many of these social, economic and administrative problems can be addressed – effectively and quickly – if the new authorities put their minds to it."

The High Representative and EU Special Representative also pointed out that the issue of dual citizenship needed to be resolved.

"This would help maintain an enduring relationship between the Diaspora and their homeland in the interest of both and help encourage today's trickle of Diaspora investment to grow into a flood," he wrote.

Current legislation requires citizens holding dual citizenship to choose one citizenship and renounce the other, if no bilateral agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the concerned state is concluded by 1 January 2013. But many countries where a significant number of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens live do not sign such bilateral agreements.

"Most countries allow citizens to enjoy dual citizenship where they qualify, without restricting this right to those cases where a bilateral agreement has been concluded with another country. Bosnia and Herzegovina should do the same," Mr Schwarz-Schilling continued.

"It isn't a question of waiting until 2013 to revisit this issue. As long as the status of citizenship is unclear, tens of thousands of people in the Diaspora will think twice about coming home," the High Representative and EU Special Representative concluded. "That would be a tremendous and unnecessary loss for Bosnia and Herzegovina."

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