Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH “The Way Forward”

The Way Forward

The Peace Implementation Council decided this week to retain the Office of the High Representative and Bonn Powers for another year to help Bosnia and Herzegovina deal with the key challenges it faces in the coming months.

At our meeting in Brussels, I presented the PIC Steering Board with my assessment that progress made by the domestic authorities during the past 12 months in respect of their obligations under Dayton and the requirements of the European integration process fell short of what is necessary to proceed with closure of the OHR this year.

At the beginning of my mandate as High Representative and EU Special Representative, I made clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina would only be able to move to the next stage of post-war recovery and European integration under its own steam. The international community, I said, remains a willing and constructive partner in this process. But more dynamism and responsibility must come from Bosnia and Herzegovina itself.

In the past year, we have seen some leaders rise to this

challenge – in this respect I would single out those heading the negotiating teams for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the Central European Free Trade Agreement. But we have seen other instances where leaders have regressed into the arid rhetoric of the 1990s. And while they have been doing this, they have failed to enact reforms and contributed little or nothing to the eradication of crime and poverty that are the twin afflictions of this country and real concerns for its citizens.

The PIC Steering Board responded to this state of affairs by deciding that the mandate of the Office of the High Representative will be extended until June 2008. It also reaffirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and specifically called on me to take action to ensure that the relevant authorities fulfil this country's international obligations.

The PIC Steering Board also laid out for the authorities the key tasks that must be accomplished in the coming months. Top of the list was agreeing a police restructuring implementation plan, in accordance with the October 2005 Political Agreement on police reform, that paved the way for SAA talks. This issue, more than any other, stands between Bosnia and Herzegovina and signing an SAA with the European Union.

The policy agenda outlined by the PIC Steering Board is not in the first place about satisfying international requirements. It is about improving life for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and abandoning the grandstanding rhetoric that has dominated political debate, while accomplishing nothing for citizens.

Indeed, the PIC Steering Board explicitly expressed support for the reform agenda set out by the new Council of Ministers with police restructuring and other preconditions for an SAA at the top of the agenda. When it is enacted, this agenda will take Bosnia and Herzegovina where its citizens want to go, and

the international community is ready to maintain a constructive partnership with this country's authorities every step of the way.

In my remaining time as High Representative and EU Special Representative, I will concentrate on helping secure the remaining reforms – especially those relating to police restructuring – that will at last clear the way for the signing of an SAA.

In the coming months, I also intend to help put in place a constitutional reform process – in partnership with the United States – aimed at helping Bosnia and Herzegovina develop the kind of constitutional structure it needs to become a modern and efficient state. For this, as of 1 March, I have an expanded mandate and additional resources in my capacity as EU Special Representative.

There are key steps forward that we the international community and you, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are waiting for, and they can and should be taken quickly. The ball is in the court of this country's political leaders who, having formed governments, must now rise to meet the ownership challenge, take transition forward and prepare the ground for OHR closure next year.

Christian Schwarz-Schilling is the international community's High Representative and European Union's Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.