

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH “Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Peace and Security Will Not Be Placed at Risk “



Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Peace and Security Will Not Be Placed at Risk

Ever since becoming High Representative and EU Special Representative, I have sought to bring about a transition to domestic ownership in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, above all, to instil responsibility for decision-making in domestic institutions and politicians. Though progress has at times been slow and frustrating, I still believe that this is the only course that leads to the European future for which the vast majority of this country’s citizens yearn and towards which we must make decisive steps forward during 2007.

I am not, however, prepared to gamble with the future of this country or risk the investment that the international community has made in its reconstruction. After analysing the situation both in the region and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have concluded that the Bonn Powers and the Office of the High Representative (OHR) should continue in some form and have

been presenting this view in my discussions with decision-makers on my visits to key capitals.

I have also concluded that this country is still able to take a clear step forward, but that the transition process will take more time. The learning curve has been steep and the international community has to show patience. In order to give the international community the greatest possible range of options, therefore, I made clear to German Chancellor Angela Merkel that I would be stepping down as High Representative and EU Special Representative at the end of my mandate on 30 June in a letter after my meeting with her on 11 January.

The real issue is not whether the OHR closes or whether I am High Representative, but how quickly Bosnia and Herzegovina can move forward under its own steam towards Europe and away from Dayton. My future is incidental; the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is paramount.

I have deliberately not used the Bonn Powers to resolve issues that are the responsibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina's elected leaders, except in matters that directly affect the peace and stability of the country or cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. I have used the powers of my office when a total impasse has been at the expense of citizens, such as in Mostar. Moreover, just the threat of the use of Bonn Powers was enough to help the ITA Governing Board to come to a decision on temporary VAT allocation.

In the course of the past year, there have also been many positive results. Elections were successfully organised exclusively by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time. Difficult coalition negotiations among political parties have been conducted and governments are being formed with only minimal international involvement in the process. The Presidency has also taken up its responsibilities and played a positive role in the process of

government formation.

Had I been systematically using the Bonn Powers, I might have been able to give an impression of progress, but it would have been a false impression. Moreover, there would be no way of establishing the reality of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina or knowing whether or not the country has the capacity to move forward without a High Representative.

In the course of the past year, it has become possible to make an objective assessment of how well or how badly the country is doing and where the problems lie. And it is only by establishing the reality of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina that it is possible to develop the mechanisms to assist this country on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration.

In the five weeks between now and the February meeting of the Peace Implementation Council, I shall continue to consult with decision-makers in PIC capitals as well as with political leaders in this country to build a consensus around the best way to help Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to move forward. The PIC exists to oversee implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and we are all determined to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains stable, and able to continue on its path towards the European Union.

In my remaining time as High Representative and EU Special Representative, I intend to raise the profile of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina by developing and expanding a new EU Special Representative's office and to focus on assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina fulfil the key preconditions for signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union.

At the same time, I will continue to emphasise the importance of making progress on constitutional reform for the future of this country. A broad-based process is needed to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to reform its constitution step by step with

the assistance of the international community and the involvement of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The international community, both Europe and the United States, should provide technical and financial assistance, to enable the process to include all sectors of society, relevant experts, and give the Parliament, political leaders and citizens the capacity to take this important reform forward.

And finally, I intend to make sure that the transition to my successor, whoever that may be, is smooth and that the instruments at his or her disposal are appropriate to take Bosnia and Herzegovina forward in partnership with the international community.

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