Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH “Time to Ask What Bosnia and Herzegovina Can Do for Europe”

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Joining the European Union is a two-way process. Accession countries change in order to integrate. But the European Union changes too in order to respond to the new internal dynamic that accession countries create.

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Stabilisation and Association negotiations are well advanced, which means that this two-way process is increasingly pertinent. Until now, the key issues have all been about Bosnia and Herzegovina harmonising its laws and administrative, broadcasting and public security structures with those of the European Union.

But the other part of the process involves Bosnia and Herzegovina beginning to contribute to the EU agenda. To be sure, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a seat at the table yet. Membership is still some years away. But it does have a great deal to contribute to the evolving dynamic of Europe in

the 21st century. To do that it must be proactive and engaged.

For the next six months, Germany will hold the Presidency of the European Union and will aim to drive the strategic agenda forward. Yesterday, I met with Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin. Chancellor Merkel made it clear that the Western Balkans will be one of Germany's priorities as EU President. Germany is committed to assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other countries of the region on the path towards European integration.

If Bosnia and Herzegovina were able to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union during the German Presidency, that would be a major milestone.

But Germany's EU Presidency has other priorities too, which also affect Bosnia and Herzegovina as an aspiring member of the Union and European neighbour. Germany is acutely aware of the importance of reaching an acceptable solution for the status of Kosovo, which will enhance stability in the region and allow the Western Balkans to look towards a brighter, European future.

Other priorities for the German EU Presidency include developing a new energy policy to suit the demands of the changing situation for the European Union; agreeing a new European Constitution to ensure the European Union functions effectively and efficiently for all its current and future members; combating terrorism and international organised crime; ensuring the European Union's enlargement policy is managed constructively for both those already in the EU family, and those aspiring to join; and championing peace and democracy around the world.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a key element in the stabilisation of the Western Balkans. That matters to Europe, not least to Germany, which has close geographical and commercial ties with the region. But the people of this country and their leaders

must understand that, in a very crowded field, this is not enough to put Bosnia and Herzegovina at the top of the list of priorities. To move closer to the top, Bosnia and Herzegovina must make itself relevant. And it can only do that by engaging in Europe's strategic issues in a constructive, confident and proactive way.

US President John F Kennedy famously urged his compatriots to "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country". It is in the material and strategic interest of every single person in Bosnia and Herzegovina to emulate this – and ask not what Europe can do for you, but rather ask what you can do for Europe.

In this, the year of the European Union's 50th anniversary, the challenges that the European Union under the Presidency of Germany is seeking to address are enormous and affect both existing and future member states. Finding solutions to what are common challenges requires an appreciation of diverse views yet the will to achieve a joint approach. The day that Bosnia and Herzegovina is able to contribute to solutions will also be the day that it will be ready for the European Union.

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