

BiH Citizens Must Take Future in Their Own Hands: Schwarz-Schilling

EMBARGOED TILL 20.00 TODAY

This Sunday's general election is especially significant because those who are elected will have full responsibility for Bosnia and Herzegovina's future, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, said in a television address to citizens broadcast on Friday evening.

"I am speaking to you directly this evening because we have reached a crucial point in Bosnia and Herzegovina's development, and I want to urge each and every one of you to vote in Sunday's elections," the High Representative/EU Special Representative said.

Although the nature of the international engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is changing, Mr Schwarz-Schilling stressed that the international community would remain engaged.

"I want to reassure you that the international community will continue to support your country, to help Bosnia and Herzegovina take its place in the heart of the European family, where it belongs," he said.

The High Representative/EU Special Representative said he believes "passionately" in parliamentary democracy because of his own experience witnessing Germany's transition from dictatorship to democracy and his 25 years as a member of parliament.

"I believe that democratic debate is in the long run more efficient and effective than quick-fix solutions imposed from

above. I also understand how important it is to take part in the democratic process. Almost 2.8 million people are entitled to vote in Bosnia and Herzegovina . Yet at the last general election only 1.3 million actually did so. Anyone who chooses not to vote will be allowing others to determine his or her future.”

The High Representative/EU Special Representative said that he would work alongside those elected on Sunday and emphasised that he will continue to act as custodian of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

“We can keep building and improving on Dayton , but neither I nor the international community will allow the Peace Agreement to be violated,” he said.

He said that, while the international community will be an active partner in Bosnia and Herzegovina ’s post-war recovery, even after the closure of the OHR, “I strongly believe that to move this country forward, you, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina , must take your future in your own hands. The European Union will do everything that is necessary to assist you as you make this transition. The future of this country lies in Europe. There is no alternative.”

The full text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative’s television address can be found at www.ohr.int