

High Representative meets with Commissioners Frattini and Rehn in Brussels

The High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, met with European Commissioners Franco Frattini and Olli Rehn today in Brussels.

Mr Frattini is Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner responsible for justice, freedom and security. Mr Rehn is European Commissioner for EU enlargement.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling explained the significance of the decision of the Peace Implementation Council to close the Office of the High Representative (OHR) on 30 June 2007. He also urged them to do everything in their power to ensure that the European Union seized the opportunity created by the closure of the OHR to give Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Western Balkans a European perspective.

In his meeting with Commissioner Frattini, the High Representative and EU Special Representative lobbied for changes to the European Union's visa regime towards citizens of BiH arguing that visa requirements should be relaxed for specific groups, including businesspeople, students and researchers, as a first step towards reducing visa requirements for all BiH citizens.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling has systematically lobbied for relaxation of visa requirements for BiH citizens in his meetings with EU interior ministers in recent months, including with Wolfgang Schaeuble, the German Interior Minister and his former cabinet colleague.

“Relaxing the visa regime is exceptionally important,” said Mr

Schwarz-Schilling. "This would provide tangible benefits to BiH citizens and help maintain the momentum towards Euro-Atlantic integration."

Commissioner Frattini was supportive of Mr Schwarz-Schilling's arguments and said that he would present his proposals for a negotiating mandate to EU justice and home affairs ministers before the summer break.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling offered to visit those capitals that were sceptical about relaxing the EU visa regime to lobby further on BiH's behalf.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling is on a two-day visit to Brussels . He will be addressing the Political and Security Committee of the European Council tomorrow.