

BiH Has to Prove it Has the Maturity for Ownership

Following the failure of the first attempt to change the constitution, and now facing slow progress on police restructuring, Bosnia and Herzegovina must demonstrate that it has the ability to continue on the reform path to Europe, the High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, told a conference of civil society activists on Saturday.

“We have to overcome the emerging pattern that suggests that this country is unable to reform itself through its own efforts,” the High Representative said. “By rejecting key reforms BiH politicians have underestimated the consequences for this country. Citizens have to carry the burden of this – and they should hold their politicians accountable in the elections.”

The High Representative proposed a twin-track strategy to move forward from the present situation.

“First, parliament and government must intensify their efforts to push forward the legislation that has to be enacted if BiH is to make the progress that its citizens want to make towards European integration. This means police reform, PBS, the Higher Education Law, and the laws that are needed to consolidate the Single Economic Space.”

The High Representative drew particular attention to the urgent need for constructive progress on police reform. “RS Prime Minister Dodik is threatening to bring Police Reform to a grinding halt: indeed if on Wednesday the RSNA decides to hold the participation of RS experts in the Directorate to ransom, that may very well be the result,” he warned. “The authorities of this country must be aware of that possibility and understand that the electorate will want to know why BiH

is going backwards on the integration process and on effective crime fighting. Mr Dodik has assured me that he will uphold the three principles; this commitment must now be reflected in action.”

The second track is a gradual improvement of BiH’s constitutional arrangements in such a way that state competencies and the effectiveness of decision-making processes are enhanced.

The High Representative noted that the failure of the BiH parliament in April to endorse constitutional reform has delayed improvements in the efficiency of BiH’s administration which would have helped the authorities serve citizens better and would have helped BiH engage more constructively in the Euro-Atlantic integration process. “The politicians came close – but ultimately there wasn’t sufficient political maturity to enact the agreement,” he said, adding that “lessons must be learned from this and reform must be agreed in the long run. It’s up to the parties and to civil society and to voters how to proceed from here.”

“After the October elections we should undertake a new initiative for constitutional reform, building on these experiences. It should be a step-by-step approach and not a grand design. It will require time, maturity and openness. I am willing to play the role of an active facilitator in this process,” he said.

The High Representative emphasized that the motive force for this positive change must come from within BiH. It will not come from the International Community. “BiH has to learn to assume full responsibility and prove that it has the maturity for ownership – and civil society has to play a central role in that,” he said.

The High Representative was speaking at a conference in Sarajevo organized by the Friedrich Ebert, Konrad Adenauer,

Friedrich Naumann, and Heinrich Boll foundations.