

BiH Sovereignty Not in Question, Full Integration in Europe the Way Forward For BiH

Bosnia and Herzegovina's clear strategic goal must be to implement reforms that will raise living standards and allow the country to integrate fully in European structures, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling concluded at their meeting in Moscow today.

The High Representative and the Foreign Minister noted that neither BiH Entity has jurisdiction to organize a referendum on separation. Minister Lavrov confirmed Russia's commitment to upholding the Dayton Peace Agreement to which is Russia is a guarantor.

Foreign Minister Lavrov expressed his full support for the High Representative's plan for the transition of the OHR to an EU Special Representative's Office by the middle of next year, and acknowledged that it is high time that the International Community transferred full responsibility to the BiH authorities. They agreed that BiH has made significant progress though there is still much work to be done, but that it is work must be done by BiH's leaders.

The High Representative welcomed Russia's support for the transition agenda, underlining the fact that "this would require that BiH's political and civil leaders step forward, taking on greater responsibility for BiH's future as the International Community steps back". The High Representative added "I take the view that under the EUSR structure the EU will coordinate closely with non-EU members of the Peace Implementation Council".

Agreeing that BiH's Parliaments and political leaders must press ahead with the major reforms required for the completion of BiH's Stabilisation and Association Agreement, in particular Police reform – which must be conducted in line with the three EC principles – Foreign Minister Lavrov and the High Representative said that patience, and a willingness to find compromise, are essential to securing BiH's future within the European Union.

During the meeting the High Representative briefed Foreign Minister Lavrov on the core reform agenda which BiH politicians can and should carry forward before the October elections – and he once again emphasised that time is of the essence. There are only 16 weeks left before the elections – and even without this overarching political consideration, BiH's leaders must understand that every day of delay is another day in which citizens are deprived of the benefits of reform.

Minister Lavrov and the High Representative reconfirmed their commitment to ensuring full cooperation for the work of the ICTY, as was stated by the Peace Implementation Council in Vienna . This remains a fundamental requirement for Euro-Atlantic integration. Minister Lavrov and the HR urged the BiH authorities, and in particular the RS President and the RS Government to work to fulfil their obligations and take decisive and rapid action to ensure that all remaining indictees, and in particular Mladic and Karadzic, are transferred to The Hague.