

Christian Schwarz-Schilling: Delaying OHR's Departure not in BiH's Interest

Delaying the closure of the OHR would not be in the interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina because the country has travelled as far as it can under international tutelage, High Representative and EU Special Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling wrote in his weekly column, which appeared in the BiH press today.

To move forward, Bosnia and Herzegovina must take its destiny in its own hands; BiH politicians have to take responsibility for their country's future; and BiH citizens have to take ownership of the peace, Mr Schwarz-Schilling said.

"Prolonging the existence of the OHR would only slow Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress towards European integration," the High Representative/EU Special Representative wrote in an article that was published in Dnevni avaz, Nezavisne novine and Večernji list.

The OHR has already begun preparations to shut down on 30 June 2007 and those preparations are ongoing. At the same time and in parallel, the European Union is engaged in planning to create a reinforced Office of the EU Special Representative to be fully operational by the time the OHR closes.

The June decision of political directors of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board to close the OHR will be subject to review and confirmation at their February 2007 meeting "taking into account the overall situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region".

While Mr Schwarz-Schilling cannot pre-empt the February decision, he can make clear the areas and issues that will

influence PIC Steering Board political directors deliberations. This is what he did during his visit to Banja Luka last week.

“If the PIC Steering Board were to be confronted with a situation in February in which key reforms are blocked and, as a consequence, a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) cannot be signed with the European Commission, this might affect their final decision on whether and when OHR closes” the High Representative/EU Special Representative explained.

To assist Bosnia and Herzegovina move forward, the country will benefit from a robust engagement by the European Union, including the combined capabilities of the European Commission, EUFOR, the EU Police Mission and the EUSR Office.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling pointed out that the reform agenda would not disappear with the closure of the OHR, but would intensify as Bosnia and Herzegovina moves closer to the European Union.

“Those who block reforms today may succeed in their immediate objectives, but the cost will be high,” he wrote. “They would put off the day when this country earns the right to EU membership. They might also ensure that the OHR must remain on the scene.

“They would not, however, alter or obscure the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina’s only guaranteed route to a secure peace and prosperous life for its citizens runs via Brussels,” the High Representative/EU Special Representative concluded.

For the full text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative’s column, see <https://www.ohr.int>