

# Remarks by the High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling at a Conference on BiH and the EU Association Process: “EU Integration a Two-Way Street”

*Organised by the Heinrich-Boell Foundation*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Stabilisation and Association negotiations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union are taking place.

This is good.

However, there are various misapprehensions about the process.

This is less good.

First the positive: the talks are under way.

As recently as last autumn it was by no means clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina would ever be in a position to *begin* these talks.

Now the process is moving forward.

However, as you know, the European Commission, following the fourth meeting of the Reform Process Monitoring team last week, expressed dissatisfaction with the rate of implementation of necessary reforms.

The Commission team emphasised that Bosnia and Herzegovina could still finalise an SAA agreement by the end of this year. But to achieve this, progress must be made on police reform, on reforming the Public Broadcasting System, on improving the business environment, on rehabilitating the education system, among other things.

Delaying these reforms until after the elections is not an option. If they are delayed until then, there will be no SAA agreement this year.

Why are this country's politicians dragging their feet on implementing reforms that are necessary for EU integration – something that practically every citizen in this country fervently wants?

This may well be because of misapprehensions about the process.

This is because the SAA talks are moving ahead with little regard for the philosophical, cultural, historical or social context in which they are taking place.

As a result, many people in this country see the accession process simply in terms of Bosnia and Herzegovina straining to fit the EU mould.

Reforms are viewed as the *price* of EU membership.

This is the wrong way round!

The reforms that Bosnia and Herzegovina must implement have not been devised for the benefit of Brussels bureaucrats.

These reforms are for the benefit of Bosnians.

Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have to reform to suit the EU.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has to reform for itself so as to be able to deliver benefits to its own citizens.

Police reform means greater security and more fairness. PBS reform means better and more inclusive TV programming. Education reform means worthwhile qualifications and more books in better heated classrooms. Business environment reform means, in the long run, more jobs and higher livings standards.

In terms of the philosophical, cultural, historical and social context, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not and should never view itself as a beggar at the gates of Europe.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has much to offer the EU.

It is seeking membership of the EU because it is compatible with the other countries of Europe, because the philosophical and cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important, an integral and a distinctive part of European heritage.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is seeking EU membership because its historical experience provides it with insights and aptitudes that will enhance the EU's capacity to address core issues of 21<sup>st</sup> century politics, including issues related to the peaceful and productive coexistence of different cultures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to join the club because it has intellectual and professional attributes that will make it a productive and valued member of the club.

So the approach to Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration – both from here and from Brussels – must be based on the clear understanding that this is a win-win situation. The EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina will both gain.

Such an understanding – that we are implementing reforms because we believe they will work for us, and because we believe that in seeking accession we will bring valuable resources to the European table – should energise the public debate over SAA reforms and eliminate the damaging reluctance

to embrace reform that we have seen among so many politicians.

The election campaign is not a time to portray SAA reforms as irritating and alien but to champion them as necessary and beneficial. I believe we will have a very productive campaign if citizens simply ask candidates:

- Have you promoted or obstructed SAA reforms?
- If you have obstructed them – please explain why?

Thank you