

OHR's Statement at the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference in Banja Luka

High Representative/EU Special Representative in Zagreb

The High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, is in Zagreb today and tomorrow.

Today, he is giving a speech at the 10th Croatian Forum and meeting with Croatian President Stipe Mesic.

In his speech, which is entitled *Neighbourly Relations between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Mr Schwarz-Schilling examines the challenges facing Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe in Southeastern Europe, focusing on the ways in which Europe can and must assist the entire region in building democracy.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling describes the role he intends to play as EU Special Representative in taking forward constitutional reform processes and in general assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina on its road towards the European Union after the planned closure of the Office of the High Representative at the end of June 2007.

The text of this speech will be made available on both the OHR and the EUSR web sites in German this afternoon.

Reconciliation Has to Be Won

Senior Deputy High Representative, Peter Bas-Backer, will address a conference in Belgrade tomorrow on reconciliation and tolerance in Southeast Europe. In his remarks, Ambassador Bas-Backer will argue that reconciliation isn't a luxury but a necessity if citizens of war-torn countries are to escape the dangerous consequences of endemic trauma. "Despite the popular, pernicious and almost wholly wrong argument during the war that this is a region of 'ancient ethnic hatreds', there is no reason why the western Balkans should be an exception" to the human capacity to overcome trauma, Ambassador Bas-Backer will say.

“In order to make reconciliation possible, however, we, but in particular local political civil society and religious leaders, have to work on it actively and persistently. We have to work much harder than we did during the first decade of peace. Precious time was lost. It can even be argued, in the case of BiH, that the gulf separating its constituent peoples widened rather than closed after the war. But it is still not too late – if we start now.

“There are two related illusions (or delusions) that we need to be careful about. The first is the belief that reconciliation is ‘not all that important’ in the overall scheme of peace implementation. Hold elections, get the economy right, fix the constitution and all will be well. Alas, it doesn’t work that way, as we have discovered to our cost elsewhere. The other illusion is that post-conflict reconciliation, given sufficient time, will happen miraculously by itself. Let me emphasize again, however, that reconciliation and renewed trust among national communities requires conscious commitment and hard work. The passage of time can help, but it can also freeze enmities as well as traumas. A buoyant economy can help as well, but it can also stimulate intense conflict over the division of the spoils. In short, there is no indirect or automatic route to national reconciliation. It must be actively sought and struggled for if this or any other region is to enjoy lasting peace and stability.”

The full text of Ambassador Bas-Backer’s speech will be available on the OHR website tomorrow.