

Remarks by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, the High Representative for BiH and R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs in Washington

April 21, 2006

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I just wanted to take this occasion to welcome Mr. Schwarz-Schilling to the State Department, first of all, to thank him. This is not his first visit to the State Department, but to thank him for taking on the responsibility of representing the entire international community in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He has done an outstanding job since his arrival and the United States is very grateful to him for everything he's done to try to advance the cause of peace in Bosnia and of justice.

I think all of you know that there are some very important events taking place this week. The process of constitutional reform is being advanced and the United States hopes very much that both houses of the parliament will now agree to the legislation that has been put forward. You'll remember when the Bosnian leaders came to the United States in November, they met with Secretary Rice and she told them that she felt that the Dayton Accords had to be updated and modernized so that the state could become a truly unified state and a normal state in the future. We're now seeing – and she suggested a way forward for them and suggested that in the winter they

work on a process of constitutional reform.

We are now seeing the fruits of that effort. We do have an agreement among the political parties on constitutional reform. It now needs to be fully approved by the parliament. And the United States is working very closely with the European Union and of course with the High Representative, Mr. Schwarz-Schilling, to make certain that the political parties understand this is the collective wish of the international community. So we hope that process will be advanced.

I'd invite you to say a few words.

MR. SCHWARZ-SCHILLING: Thank you very much. It's my first visit now in the new position I have since February this year and I must say that we are in a crucial year and I think that the cooperation between the United States and Europe in this area is one of the basic prepositions to come to a success in this area. And the main priorities are the constitutional reform and I think we had a very good way to assist each other and to convince the people, and it's more to do it by convincing them than to make interventions. And I think this is a new era, it's a new face in this whole process and I am dedicated to that era and I think we're coming to good successes.

The second point is economy, my priority, because there I think there are many things to do and we have to do. There's also the question of the visa regime of Europe. I think there have to be new steps, that there is a real step to integration to Europe. And education. Education is a very, very important part of the sustainability of the peace of this area, of this country, because its three constituent people with a question of three religions, if they have not a good education the next generation will not have the peace. And therefore, I think we have to make a very important focus to this point.

And the third point is, of course, elections in a democratic process, elections are the top priority. And this is really now the first time that these people can decide who is governing us for the next four years. And that is the message, and not, my God, yes, we have now the – the elections hopefully is (unintelligible) is over and we can make new steps in politics. No, no, no, this is a main point and there must be a transfer in process and the whole civil society must be engaged. And this is – therefore it's a priority also in my term here for this year.

Well, and I must say that I thank the United States for all their big help and I know also that the final anchor of the feeling of these people in Bosnia for security and peace are the United States, even when we are now driving it more and more force, with efforts to the European Union with the Commission's SSR negotiation. But I know and therefore it's one of the really last necessity, most important that United States still will be fully engaged in this area because I think the United States have done decisive steps in the '90s to come to peace there and they have to do it also in the 21st century with another sharing. You will have to do more, I'm sure.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Exactly.

MR. SCHWARZ-SCHILLING: But please be engaged in this area.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: And I think we are and I think you've seen Secretary Rice's leadership and we're seeing the fulfillment of that as constitutional reform proceeds. It was born here in Washington in November – the effort – and we're very, very happy to work with Mr. Schwarz-Schilling and his European colleagues on this.

Barry.

QUESTION: Mr. Minister, you seem though to be convinced the process is so well along that you're ready to close your

office next year, so you're confident of the process. But I don't know what the U.S. position is. Do you think it moved well enough along in Bosnia that the UN can close down and Bosnia-Herzegovina could become a normal democratic European state?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We think that Bosnia has to become a normal democratic European country. The Dayton Accords were written in such a way in the middle of a war in the autumn of 1995 designed to stop the fighting and designed to provide a temporary way for the parties to begin to create a political life. And I think all of us agree, and I remember in our first meeting we agreed, that now the process had to be to create a sense of normalcy, so that power has to be devolved to all the people of the country and that the international community should begin, very slowly and carefully, to recede so that the local political leaders can take the major decisions in the life of the country.

This is a big step forward. It's an opportunity. And we were encouraged by the vote this week to proceed to the parliament for final approval of the constitutional reform and we urge the members of the parliament, whether they be Bosniac or Croat or Serbs, to think of the future of their country and to vote for a reform that will create one president, not three, and one single set of institutions to guide the country.

QUESTION: And Mr. Burns, there is also opposition for constitutional change, to mention just the Catholic Church and some political party. Any comment on that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh, I think any time that you put forward ambitious ideas that require profound political and even sociological change, you're going to get some opposition. But great things don't happen unless people take responsibility and people think ambitiously about the future. And so that's what Secretary Rice has been trying to do and put forward the concept of constitution reform.

MR. SCHWARZ-SCHILLING: And I must say that I started a very good talk to the bishops and to Cardinal Pulic and I even had the opportunity to have a very short-time talk with the Holy Father, with the Pope in Rome, and I think they – also, they are thinking to discuss it now. And we have to divide the question whether there is a state and church and if there is a really the question of the Christian picture of human rights and so on, then the church should really step in and see. But if it's a daily work, then they also should see that it is for the whole state and not just for one group or for one religion. That's all. So I think we are coming to this path more and more.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much. Thank you.