

Schwarz-Schilling in BiH Parliament: Political Crisis Is Blocking Path to Europe



Political crisis is blocking Bosnia and Herzegovina's path to Europe, causing the public to lose trust in politicians and the younger generation to feel less and less optimistic about the future, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling told Bosnia and Herzegovina's legislators today.

In a wide-ranging farewell speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Schwarz-Schilling addressed, in particular, the issue of inflammatory rhetoric that has stoked the current political crisis, including responses to the verdict of the International Court of Justice in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina versus Serbia and Montenegro.

He also explained why he would not be the last High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the significance of the Peace Implementation Council's decision to keep open the Office of the High Representative; assessed the results of asking political leaders to rise to the ownership challenge, warning that Bosnia and Herzegovina was falling behind its neighbours; and outlined a constitution-reform process.

"I have heard politicians making arguments and formulating policies that only exploit fears among the public, instead of

building trust between all sides and making concrete progress on real-life issues,” the High Representative said, pointing out that it was not acceptable to use radical rhetoric about referendums, the abolition of entities or events elsewhere in the region.

“All public figures have a duty to behave responsibly in both word and deed to build a climate of peace and security and to respect that the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and both its entities are multinational communities of three constituent peoples,” he said.

“This year has seen a deterioration in the political atmosphere relating directly to reactions to the judgment of the International Court of Justice,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling continued, pointing out that the ICJ had ruled that genocide had occurred in Srebrenica, stressing the need for justice and illustrating steps he had taken to address real issues in Srebrenica.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative also said that he deplored the political manipulation of the issue by politicians and attempts to disrupt the constitutional and territorial order of the country.

“A unilateral change of the Dayton Peace Agreement is legally unachievable and calls for such changes can only pose grave risks to peace and stability,” he told the Parliamentary Assembly, adding that: “There is no legal obligation from the ICJ verdict calling for the abolition of an entity.”

The High Representative and EU Special Representative described the PIC’s decision not to close the Office of the High Representative as a “setback”, pointing out that the OHR is not staying to do the jobs for the politicians of this country or to impose new solutions, but to ensure that peace and stability continue.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling also catalogued laws that had not been

passed and occasions that he had been forced to intervene to maintain functionality.

“Despite a lack of progress on a number of fronts, the strategy of ownership will not change,” he continued. “It must be a gradual process, and there is no alternative. The lessons are painful, but are an invaluable learning experience in democratisation and nation-building.”

The High Representative and EU Special Representative described Bosnia and Herzegovina’s constitutional structures as “complicated and inefficient”, pointing out that they do “not yet fit modern constitutional standards”.

“Now that the peace implementation process and the institution of the High Representative are coming to an end – and the European integration process is now the key task – it is time to reform the constitution and develop a stable, self-sustainable and efficient state structure for Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling said.

“This is something that you, the politicians of this country, will have to tackle over the next period,” he continued. “The international community stands ready to assist, but we will not do it for you. It is perhaps the greatest challenge ahead of you and will require the hardest of compromises and the greatest amount of constructive engagement that this country has seen.”

The High Representative and EU Special Representative described constitutional reform commissions and conventions in other countries in Europe and the need for an institutionalised process in Bosnia and Herzegovina “led by Bosnian politicians with input from across Bosnian society, supported by facilitation and assistance from the international community”.

He also said that the time had come to set up such a process, rather than leaving it to media headlines and sound bites.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative said that he had been meeting party leaders individually in partnership with the United States, the European Commission and European Union Presidency to hear their views and ask for a commitment to establish such a broad process and that they had showed willingness for such dialogue.

“I shall work to secure that commitment before I leave, so that my successor can work with you and the political leaders of this country to build on this,” he told the Parliamentary Assembly. “This process must be set on track now, so that results can be delivered within this legislative period.”

The full text of the High Representative and EU Special Representative’s [speech](#) is available at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.