

Schwarz-Schilling: Police Restructuring Agreement Within Reach

An agreement on police restructuring that respects the wishes of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens and fulfils the three EC principles is within reach, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in his weekly newspaper column.

"The Police Reform Directorate is currently finishing its report," the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote in the article which appeared today in *Dnevni avaz*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Večernji list*. "Now is the time for the parties to seek solutions on police reform, which are in compliance with the three EC principles and which would enable the Directorate to issue a proposal on police reform implementation that is based on a sound political consensus."

"This is a unique opportunity for the newly elected leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to secure the country's European future."

Mr Schwarz-Schilling explained that the European Commission opened negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) only after the parliaments of Republika Srpska, the Federation and Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed to move forward on police reform.

"Today, the European Union expects the Police Reform Directorate to deliver a police reform plan before the end of the year," the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote. "And it expects the governments and parliaments of Republika Srpska, the Federation and the State to adopt a reform plan by March 2007 at the latest."

Mr Schwarz-Schilling welcomed all proposals concerning police budgeting, but rejected the need for wholesale fiscal reform. "The best solution for financing the new police structure is the same mechanism as is already used to fund the operations of SIPA and the State Border Service, namely the regular state budgeting system," he wrote.

"In this way, police officers throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina will know that they receive the same pay for the same job and have the same benefits and support wherever they serve."

The High Representative and EU Special Representative explained that the European Union wanted police reform because it needed a single counterpart with the legislative authority to deal with and implement the many justice and home affairs issues required in the accession process.

In addition, European and international police forces require a single interlocutor with whom they can discuss operational matters. And Bosnia and Herzegovina needs police reform to combat organised crime, illegal migration and international terrorism, Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote.

"If police reform cannot be agreed," the High Representative and EU Special Representative concluded. "Anyone who blocked an agreement would be responsible for delaying the signature of the SAA and denying the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina the benefits that come with EU integration – visa-free travel, economic assistance and technical support, access to markets, thereby creating a climate attracting more international investment to create jobs, and to build better education and health care."

The full text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative's weekly column can be accessed at www.ohr.int