Schwarz-Schilling: Stop holding Bosnia and Herzegovina hostage to “big issues”

Bosnia and Herzegovina has “big issues” to deal with, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in his weekly newspaper column, but everything cannot be put on hold until they have been resolved.

“When you have difficult tasks, you don’t go at them all at once and all in the same way,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote in an article that appeared today in *Dnevni avaz, Nezavisne novine* and *Večernji list*. “The sensible approach is to complete the tasks that can be completed straight away, and keep working on the other tasks until time and improved circumstances make it possible to finish them.”

Despite this, political parties have held sensible and necessary legislation hostage to “big issues” for many years and will – with no apparent thought for the possible negative impact on citizens – block progress on a tactical objective that has general support, the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote. “Straightforward things that could be done today to improve the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina are put off until next year, when more difficult and contentious things may – or may not – be accomplished.”

Mr Schwarz-Schilling explained that the fall-out from the International Court of Justice verdict represented a challenge that Bosnia and Herzegovina, its peoples and citizens would have to deal with over a period of years. “It cannot be addressed in a matter of days, and every other problem cannot

be put on hold until this one is resolved," he wrote.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative also drew attention to attempts to agree a package of constitutional reforms.

"We believe that in the course of this year we can bridge the final, narrow gap separating the various strands of opinion and reach agreement that will benefit all citizens. We know that this is not going to happen tomorrow and we know that it is not going to happen without the consistent and constructive engagement of parties that must stay the course over months of negotiation. This problem cannot be resolved in matter of days – and every other problem cannot be put on hold until this one is solved," he wrote.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling pointed out, however, that reaching agreement on police reform was most more urgent. "If the parties fail to reach agreement by the middle of March, the prospect of signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which is the first step on the road to EU membership and will allow the European Union to broaden and deepen its assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, will slip over the horizon.

"The parties must focus on resolving their differences so that we can establish a police service in this country that has the capacity to fight crime and corruption effectively. But this does not mean that other urgent tasks should be put on hold in the meantime," he wrote.

"While political leaders must make progress on police reform and address other major issues, the Council of Ministers has to carry on with the day-to-day business of running the country," the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote.

"It must take effective action to get the country's infrastructure working, to resolve key questions affecting economic resources, to regulate the state's relations with

religious communities, and a host of other tasks… And if agreement on one issue on the agenda cannot be reached, ministers should work to make progress on other issues, rather than postponing sessions," he wrote.

"It is time to stop holding sensible and necessary legislation hostage to 'big issues', to rise to the challenge of ownership and to build a culture of compromise, pragmatism and respect for obligations entered into for the sake of future generations," the High Representative and EU Special Representative concluded.

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