

Statement: High Representative Calls for Changes in BiH Business Environment and EU Visa Regime in Order to Boost Competitiveness, Create Jobs

"Bosnia and Herzegovina has come back to the global technology market," the High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, told journalists in Hannover today. He said the first ever participation by a BiH delegation at the world's largest computer fair, CEBIT, represented an important initial step in boosting contacts between the BiH IT sector and prospective international partners, and also in changing negative perceptions about BiH that continue to deter desperately needed investment.

"BiH already had a developed high-tech sector before the war, and its return to this market internationally is "a landmark occasion that is very important for BiH, for CEBIT and for the world market," the High Representative said.

However, he noted that the existing visa regime imposes severe constraints on BiH companies that are trying to secure contracts outside the country. "It's impossible that businesspeople and engineers, for example, have to go through the difficult and time-consuming process of applying for a visa when they might have to dispatch a software engineer to fix a particular problem that a client is having. Companies cannot send an engineer immediately. In this way, no country can really be competitive in Europe.

The High Representative said he would be taking this matter up in his discussions with EU ministers.

One proposal arising from this visit is for companies in the BiH IT sector – there are around 300, mostly SMEs and almost all privately owned – to form an association to lobby the authorities for administrative reforms that will make it easier for them to expand quickly and create jobs.

The High Representative expressed the hope that the companies would realise this initiative.

“My highest priority is to try and encourage economic growth,” he said. “It’s an impossible situation that we have such high unemployment, particularly among young people. That has to be changed, and there is substantial scope for growth in the high-tech sector.”