

The Ownership Challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The events of the past six months have demonstrated the scale of the challenge involved in moving to local ownership in Bosnia and Herzegovina but the international community should remain committed to this policy, High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schillingsaid to the UN Security Council (UNSC) today.

In a wide-ranging speech analysing the difficulties of putting the principle of ownership into practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina , Mr Schwarz-Schilling covered plans for the closure of the Office of the High Representative and reinforcement of the EU presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina , the stalled reform process, and the importance of key reforms such as constitutional reform and police reform.

He also drew special attention to the plight of police officers decertified by the UN International Police Task Force.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative explained how the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council had decided in June to close the Office of the High Representative at the end of June 2007.

He also recognised the PIC Steering Board's prudence to review and confirm its decision early next year.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative explained that despite considerable goodwill in Bosnia and Herzegovina opportunists have sought to exploit the difficulties of transition to play on old fears.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling said that although part of the international community believed that now was not the time to

step back and hand over the reins, "The international community must hold its course and continue gradually handing over responsibility."

The High Representative and EU Special Representative also pointed out that Bosnia and Herzegovina was, in many respects, fortunate, since the direction in which it is travelling is clear.

"If there is one issue that the overwhelming majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina agree on, it is that their country's future lies in Europe."

The High Representative and EU Special Representative paid tribute to the skills of the team negotiating the technical side of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, singling out Prime Minister Adnan Terzic and lead negotiators Igor Davidovic and Osman Topcagic by name.

He pointed out, however, that there was also a political side to the Agreement and that political reforms, that are a precondition for completing the SAA process, have stalled.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling attributed the slowdown in the reform process to the need for a period of adaptation and adjustment to the concept of ownership and the 1 October elections.

On police reform, a key outstanding requirement for the SAA, Mr Schwarz-Schilling said: "This is needed for Bosnia and Herzegovina to progress towards EU integration and, above all, it is needed for the sake of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

On constitutional reform, Mr Schwarz-Schilling said that the Dayton constitution that was created in 1995 to end a war needed to evolve "to meet the demands for a functional, fiscally sustainable state able to join Euro-Atlantic institutions".

Although a constitutional reform package had narrowly failed to get the necessary two-thirds majority in the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina in April, the parties that had supported it at that time now had the necessary two-thirds majority.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative described the April constitutional reform package as “less than perfect”, but noted “it is a reasonable first step... and represents the level of compromise and progress that can be made at this time.”

“The politicians of Bosnia and Herzegovina must learn that such important issues can only be dealt with one step at a time, bringing all sides along together within the process,” he added.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative highlighted the plight of police officers decertified by the IPTF without the possibility of review or appeal. He reported that he, together with the EU Police Mission, and the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have provided information to the United Nations on decertified police officers that would enable a UN review process to be established.

“We should not preach the principles of the rule of law...and, at the same time, contradict these principles,” the High Representative and EU Special Representative reminded the UN Security Council of its responsibility for resolving this issue.

The full text of the High Representative and EU Special Representative’s speech and his photo at the UNSC is available at www.ohr.int.