

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “A Clear Future – with a Road Map and Support Mechanisms to Get There”

Scenes of devastation and despair have become a staple of the evening news this summer. Conflicts in various parts of the world, and notably, of course, in Lebanon , have challenged the diplomatic and humanitarian resources of the international community.

In light of history, people here may be inclined to ask themselves whether they might not suffer a similar fate to the people of Lebanon, especially now, given that the international community's engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is changing.

Yet Bosnia and Herzegovina has a bulwark against any return to violence, a bulwark that Lebanon , to its grave misfortune, does not. Today – unlike at the beginning of the 1990s – this country has a clear future in Euro-Atlantic structures, in both the European Union and NATO, which will make it impossible that Bosnia and Herzegovina should ever be attacked or disintegrate in war again.

The international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is changing, but the international community is not withdrawing from this country. Rather, the international strategy here is one of integration. In this way, Bosnia and Herzegovina is gradually being brought into the very institutions that have

built and ensured peace in Europe for the past 60 years.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands on the verge of both a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union and membership of NATO's Partnership-for-Peace (PfP) Programme. These are both key milestones on the road towards eventual membership of both the European Union and NATO.

Bosnia and Herzegovina still has to undertake far-reaching reforms – including, in particular, the restructuring of its police services – before it will be in a position to sign a SAA. And progress also has to be made in ensuring the arrests of the most notorious indicted war criminals, before Bosnia and Herzegovina will be invited to join the Partnership-for-Peace programme.

But Bosnia and Herzegovina is being assisted on its way towards Euro-Atlantic integration by the European Commission, by EUFOR, by the EU Police Mission, by NATO and by my Office, both in my capacity as High Representative and as EU Special Representative. Moreover, this support will continue to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains firmly on the path that leads to stability and security.

Since the end of the Cold War, Euro-Atlantic institutions have systematically sought to extend the zone of stability and security in Europe. They have done this by investing in the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe to assist their transitions and, eventually, once the reform process had progressed sufficiently, by inviting these countries to become full members. Hence the historic enlargements of the European Union in 2004 and of NATO in both 1999 and 2004.

This enlargement policy has been remarkably successful – and it has clearly helped head off a plethora of problems and disputes that might otherwise have plagued the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Though Bosnia and Herzegovina

is a special case, it can and should benefit to an even greater degree.

Euro-Atlantic institutions have already made a huge investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the war and this country has travelled a very long way during the past ten-and-a-half years. Moreover, if there is one thing that all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina agree on, it is that their future is in Euro-Atlantic integration.

Achieving this goal will require cooperation among Bosnia and Herzegovina 's peoples and compromises on many issues. But critically, this country is extremely fortunate because it has a clear future and a road map and support mechanisms to get it there. I only wish that the people of Lebanon had a similar prospect.

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