

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH “It’s the Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina that Matters”



It’s the Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina that Matters

On Monday and Tuesday, the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council will meet in Brussels, together with representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by the Presidency and the Prime Minister.

A great deal has been written and said about this meeting, and almost all of it has focused on the future of the Office of the High Representative (OHR). The proper focus of attention, however, ought to be on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The prospects for the four million citizens of this country are infinitely more important than the prospects for one international organisation.

Let’s consider what the future holds for Bosnia and Herzegovina and then examine the ways in which decisions reached next week in Brussels will help ensure that this future remains bright.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina’s economy is growing; the country has joined the Central European Free Trade Agreement and begun participating in NATO’s Partnership for Peace; and Stabilisation and Association negotiations with the European Union are nearly complete.

As almost everyone now agrees, however, much of the progress

that has been made would not have been possible without the strong role played by the international community. A great deal more progress could have been made, had this country's leaders focused on implementing policies on the basis of pragmatic consensus instead of fighting among themselves.

The participants at next week's meeting in Brussels must decide on the optimal way of getting this country's leaders to take full and effective responsibility for policies that actually work and then implementing them so that they bring benefits to citizens as quickly as possible. This will be the essence of the Brussels discussions.

They may decide that this can best be achieved by recalibrating the international engagement. What is clear, however, is that this country's authorities must adopt a better approach to democratic processes. The problem of successive administrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina has not been that they have lacked ideas, but that they have lacked the discipline and pragmatism to turn at least some of their ideas into effective policies.

On the economy, for example, if the new authorities are able to enact the National Fiscal Council Law and the State Law on Obligations as well as establish a centralised banking supervision system – all of which could be done in the first half of this year – they will have made it clear to potential investors that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country in which to put their money and create jobs. Until this is done, investors and jobs will continue to go elsewhere.

If this country's authorities can enact these laws, their success will have a positive impact on the lives of the people of this country long after the issue of what to do about the OHR has been forgotten.

A key reason for the failure of successive administrations to turn policies into effective action is the dysfunctional

nature of the administrative and political system. Bosnia and Herzegovina has too much bureaucracy, and its bloated administrative apparatus delivers too little.

In addition to adopting a policy-driven approach to government, therefore, a priority for the first half of 2007 must be to set in train processes to streamline the parliamentary, government and administrative system, bring Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution into line with European democratic norms, and provide the executive with the tools it needs to do its job effectively.

This must be done in conjunction with a concerted effort to complete the remaining requirements – police restructuring, PBS reform and cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – that will clear the way for the signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union later this year.

The issue of cooperation with the ICTY remains an international and Dayton obligation that will not disappear until all indictees have been transferred to The Hague.

I draw attention to these key policy issues because in the coming days the future of the OHR is going to dominate media coverage. The future of the OHR is important – but the really important issue is the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people and their prospects as well as those of their neighbours for a European future.

Christian Schwarz-Schilling is the international community's High Representative and European Union's Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.