

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Replacing the Push of Dayton with the Pull of Brussels”

Today in Sarajevo, I will be chairing a meeting of the political directors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board. These meetings, which take place on average four times a year, are an important forum for dialogue between members of the international community and the political representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This dialogue has changed profoundly in the course of the past decade and is continuing to evolve. The early meetings of the PIC Steering Board were dominated by the most basic aspects of Dayton implementation, such as freedom of movement, the disbursement of emergency international aid, and, in the late 1990s, refugee return.

In due course, economic issues – such as improving the business climate and creating a single economic space – began to take centre stage. In recent years, the building of institutions necessary for this country’s integration in the Euro-Atlantic mainstream has increasingly served as the overarching framework within which discussion of peace implementation takes place.

The issues today are just as complex as they were in the immediate post-war period, though radically different and far more promising. So too is the relationship between the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Peace Implementation Council.

In the late 1990s, the international community held the purse strings. Bosnia and Herzegovina survived by international subsidy and the domestic authorities were financially and politically dependent on the international community.

This is no longer the case. Today, the bulk of government revenue comes from conventional sources, principally the value added tax. Bosnia and Herzegovina is no longer financially dependent on foreigners. Nor is it politically dependent. The PIC, through my office, makes fewer and fewer political interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More and more important decisions are taken exclusively by domestic leaders and institutions.

Now the international community and local authorities are partners in a joint reform programme – principally through the requirements of the Stabilisation and Association process, the route by which Bosnia and Herzegovina moves closer to the European Union. Partnership is a two-way street. The PIC will offer support and lobby for further EU integration, but the domestic authorities are expected to act in a way that is consistent with their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. In this way, their room for manoeuvre on some key policy areas is constrained by the need to conform to European standards.

This has important implications for the way in which PIC meetings are viewed inside Bosnia and Herzegovina. Replacing the push of Dayton with the pull of Brussels is more than a purely technical proposition or rhetorical flourish. It involves replacing a mandatory process – implementing the terms of the peace agreement – with an elective process – fulfilling certain requirements in order to reach a point where EU accession becomes a real prospect.

The ability of Bosnia and Herzegovina's new political leaders to carry out difficult reforms in coming weeks and months will be indicative of their willingness and capacity to assume ownership of the political process and govern this country in

the absence of the OHR.

The strategic steps which the domestic authorities are supposed to be taking are those which the main political parties have already committed themselves to: introducing European standards in policing, public broadcasting and education; reforming the constitution to make government more accountable and efficient; reforming the business environment to create jobs and reduce poverty. Discussion at meetings of the PIC Steering Board is increasingly focused on ways in which the authorities can be assisted in taking these steps, or identifying areas where they have not taken steps they promised to take.

This focus is also the way of the future. As the European Union strengthens its presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina , as the Office of the High Representative closes and the Office of the EU Special Representative becomes the lead international agency, international gatherings to discuss Bosnia and Herzegovina will increasingly reflect a genuine partnership. And the way that that partnership will bear most fruit is if the authorities stick to the long-term agenda that they and we have agreed to.

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