Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “The Meaning of PfP Membership”

NATO’s decision, announced in Riga this week, to invite Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Alliance’s Partnership-for-Peace programme and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council should not be interpreted as backtracking on ICTY cooperation. Rather, it should be seen as an important step towards Euro-Atlantic integration that brings with it additional responsibilities, including renewed ICTY cooperation.

The decision surprised many – and no Bosnia and Herzegovina representative was present at the Riga Summit. It must be viewed, therefore, as an unexpected but immensely valuable boost to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s efforts to open a new chapter in constructive international relations. It means that this country can take substantial steps forward in strengthening its security, while it implements policies that will bring it closer to full Euro-Atlantic integration in other areas.

The Partnership for Peace is an extremely flexible and innovative programme designed to facilitate cooperation with partner countries to extend the zone of peace and stability in Europe. It consists of practical, bilateral activities between individual partner countries and NATO that allow partner countries to develop their own relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation. Ultimately, therefore, it is what its members make of it.

For some, it can be a first step towards NATO membership. This was the case for the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, the

first three countries to join the Alliance after the Cold War, as well as for Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, the countries that became Allies in 2004. Moreover, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia are participating in the Membership Action Plan, a tailored programme preparing them for Alliance membership.

For others, PfP membership has amounted to relatively little. Belarus, for example, has been a member of the Partnership for Peace for more than a decade, but has a minimal collaborative programme with NATO.

Clearly, Bosnia and Herzegovina should seek to follow the path taken by countries that have now joined the Alliance or are currently working towards membership.

To do this, Bosnia and Herzegovina must make a series of political commitments and live up to them. These include preserving a democratic society; maintaining the principles of international law; fulfilling obligations under the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act and international disarmament and arms-control agreements; refraining from the threat or use of force against other states; respecting existing borders; and settling disputes peacefully.

Allied leaders made clear at Riga that they will monitor Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to live up to the values and principles set out in the PfP and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council basic documents. If, therefore, Bosnia and Herzegovina fails to cooperate with the ICTY, it will be in breach of these commitments and cannot expect to take forward its relationship with NATO.

In the coming days, the NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, will no doubt write to the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina inviting a representative of the country, possibly the Chairman of the Presidency or the Foreign Minister, to

come to Brussels to sign the PfP Framework Agreement, the document setting out Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitments and obligations as a PfP member.

After the Framework Agreement is signed, Bosnia and Herzegovina can submit a Presentation Document to NATO indicating the scope, pace and level of participation of its cooperative activities with the Alliance. This might include activities such as joint planning, training exercises and public information workshops. It should also identify steps to be taken by Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet the PfP's political goals, as well as military and other assets that Bosnia and Herzegovina might make available for PfP activities.

NATO's decision to invite Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the Partnership for Peace is more than just a pleasant surprise. It is also a golden opportunity for Bosnia and Herzegovina to move ahead, to forge deep and enduring relations with NATO and to put its own conflict behind it. It must not be wasted.

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