Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Time to Move Forward”

Next week inBrussels I will have meetings with the European Union and NATO and address the European Parliament. In the aftermath of last Sunday’s elections Bosnia and Herzegovina is entering a new political landscape, and during my Brussels visit I want to make sure that the possibilities of this landscape are properly understood by this country’s EU and NATO partners. Such meetings may not sound very enthralling, but I can assure you from my long experience in politics, that some of the least exciting meetings can be about the most interesting issues and have the most significant consequences.

I will argue that the new alignment of political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not anti-Europe or anti-reform. I will reassure European and NATO policymakers that they must keep the door open to Bosnia and Herzegovina . I will do my part – now the politicians that you have elected must do their part.

We have a lot to do before we can go through the door to Europe; the parties understand this; the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina understand this. Next week I will make every effort to ensure that those in Brussels understand that the politicians and people here have the will and the capability to re-start – and successfully complete – the reform process that was stalled in the middle of this year. But they will not just be listening to me, they will be watching the actions of those in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All the parties have expressed a commitment to carry Bosnia

and Herzegovina further along the road to Euro-Atlantic integration. They must now do that for real.

I will stress to Brussels that Sunday's poll, conducted in an orderly and transparent way, is further evidence that Bosnia and Herzegovina is becoming a functioning democracy and its citizens and their leaders understand that they are bound by the ballot box.

My message in Brussels will also be that the new governments and the new parliaments understand the need to act constructively. But if this message is to be credible, then BiH politicians must get down to business. It is less important who gets what ministry than that the ministry in question does what it is supposed to be doing.

Southeast Europe has a place in the European Union and in NATO. But each country must implement the necessary reforms to take that place. Let us be frank – until now, other countries have shown themselves more adept at doing this than Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Clearly, some reforms have to wait for parliaments to be constituted and governments to be formed. But we cannot afford to delay any more than is absolutely necessary. Europe and NATO will not have patience – and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina will not have patience – if newly elected politicians dither and prevaricate.

Police reform is one area where progress can be made quickly, through the Police Restructuring Directorate. The EU has made clear that it expects the Directorate to accelerate its work. So here is a reform where the politicians can demonstrate that they are serious about getting into Europe – I call on them to create the conditions in which an agreed report can be delivered by police experts.

I am glad to hear party leaders speaking already about the importance of constitutional reform and the necessity of

working together in order to build common ground to take this issue forward. They must agree to take the first step on this road as soon as possible.

I am optimistic and I sense already a willingness on all sides to make positive strides forward. Politicians may be tempted to revert to politics as usual, yet it is not unreasonable to hope that the faith that voters showed in turning out to vote last week will inspire this country's leaders to keep faith with the electorate – and move forward rather than sideways, backwards or stand still.

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