OHR: Mostarians Need to Turn Around Fortunes of Mostar

The Office of the High Representative has noted the frustration at the lack of progress expressed by various political leaders in Mostar in recent days and is well aware of what has and what has not been achieved in the past year. However, it is up to Mostarians and their political leaders to turn around the fortunes of Mostar, not the international community.

Mostar is not an international experiment, as certain political leaders have been reported saying, though it has been fortunate to benefit from more aid per capita than almost any other community in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the fighting. Moreover, the level of this aid and ongoing support is in historical terms almost unprecedented.

Thursday 15 March marks the third anniversary of the imposition of the Mostar Statute. This Statute was drawn up on the basis of compromise and sought to take into consideration as many interests as possible. It may or may not be ideal. However, the only way to change it is by adopting it into law and then negotiating new arrangements.

In addition to the generous support that Mostar has received during the past 13 years, international money continues to come in to the City and more, worth millions of euros, would flow in return for reforms, such as the preparation of an urban management development plan. At the same time, however,

the City has failed to collect significant sums of money in taxes and rents that it was entitled to. Moreover, the failure to implement reforms or redundancy programmes is a further drain on resources.

Because of the City authorities' failure to address various outstanding issues, the High Representative was last year obliged to appoint Norbert Winterstein as his Special Envoy to Mostar. Following three months of negotiations, Mr Winterstein proposed a series of solutions, some of which were adopted by the City Council, others of which had to be imposed. Critical deadlines related to these decisions are now approaching.

The only way that Mostar can move beyond the current seeming impasse is if its political leaders rise to the challenge of ownership and take responsibility for their own future, that of the City's citizens and of Mostar itself. To achieve this, it will be necessary to move beyond the zero-sum politics that has characterised political life in this City.

As High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote in a newspaper article this week: "In a functional democracy the only way to get what you want is by ensuring that the others get what they want too. The capacity to understand what others want and to find creative ways to reconcile different aspirations is the key to prosperity and security."