

Ownership the Key to Durable Stability



Promoting local ownership is neither easy nor risk-free, but it avoids short-term fixes in an effort to create real and durable stability, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in a newspaper article that was published today.

“In charting the right course toward a viable and functional Bosnia and Herzegovina it has been necessary to differentiate between what works and what doesn’t work,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*, the leading US business daily with a circulation greater than two million and both Asian and European editions. “It has also been necessary to change a mindset, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the international community.”

In the article, the High Representative and EU Special Representative explained both why he believed in a policy of local ownership and why the transition should take longer than originally planned.

“A year ago, at the start of my mandate, I believed that nation-building had reached a watershed and that the “quasi-protectorate” was no longer viable,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote. “I argued, therefore, that more than a decade after the end of the war, it was time for the people of this country and their elected leaders to assume full responsibility for their own destiny.”

The High Representative and EU Special Representative listed

three reasons for this approach, the first philosophical, the second practical and the third the result of EU conditionality.

Firstly, he wrote that he believed the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been misjudged because of the shortcomings of their leaders at a particular moment in history.

“I continue to believe that extensive use of the Bonn Powers would be counterproductive,” he wrote. “It would maintain a damaging culture of dependency and prevent locals from forging an authentic and home-grown, post-war political consensus.”

Secondly, Mr Schwarz-Schilling explained that it was not possible to tell which aspects of nation-building had become self-sustaining as long as the scale and intensity of the international engagement obscured the real strengths and weaknesses of the domestic political process. “It was necessary to back off in order to see whether Bosnia and Herzegovina could move forward under its own steam,” he wrote.

Thirdly, the European Union, which Bosnia and Herzegovina aspires to join, has made it clear that the legislation that is needed for further integration, such as laws on police restructuring and public broadcasting, will only be deemed acceptable if enacted by the appropriate elected bodies. “These laws can’t be imposed by the High Representative,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote that the results of the past year to have been “mixed”.

“On the one hand, the Bosnian economy is growing at a steady and substantial pace. The country has joined the Central European Free Trade Agreement and begun participating in NATO’s Partnership for Peace. Stabilisation and Association negotiations with the European Union are nearly complete and we look forward to the signing of an agreement, the first step to eventual membership, later this year.

“On the other hand, the pattern of domestic political debate has been less encouraging. The campaign that preceded last October’s general election saw party leaders revert to some of the least constructive positions we have seen in a decade – this despite the fact that civil society groups were more articulate than ever before and sought to focus the minds of politicians on bread-and-butter issues such as investment, job creation and fighting poverty,” he wrote.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative also pointed out that the process of forming coalitions at the various levels of government has proceeded without international hand-holding.

“I continue to believe in a policy of local ownership, but I also believe that the transition should take longer,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote. “There is a risk of importing instability from elsewhere in the region. And there is a risk of internal political paralysis. The local authorities need more time to adapt and the international community will have to show greater patience.”

As a result, it was not yet time to give up the Bonn Powers. “If held in reserve and used sparingly, they can still serve as a useful insurance policy against destabilisation,” he concluded.

The text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative’s [article](#) can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.