



Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH “Responsibility and Long-Term Solutions”

Responsibility and Long-Term Solutions

My view on how to secure a prosperous and democratic future for Bosnia and Herzegovina is well known. So is my take on who is responsible for making this happen: it is the job of the elected representatives of this country. If it isn't done by them, it won't be done at all. I have been criticised for holding to this view. I continue to hold it because it is true. Nowhere is the truth of it clearer than in Mostar.

Much progress has been made in Mostar since the immediate post-war period when the city was mired in a horrendous cycle of intimidation, segregation, crime, poverty and dysfunctionality. But practically everything that has been done to alleviate that misery has been done by the international community on its own or by local actors operating with the indispensable support of the international community.

The main political parties in the city have made themselves conspicuous by their refusal to pursue constructive or effective policies. It looks like they will continue to do so unless citizens make them change. Popular pressure is all the more urgent and necessary as the international community scales back its direct engagement.

The only viable future for Mostar is as a unified city, with a modern and efficient administration capable of keeping the peace, running competitive services, and attracting investment that will create jobs and eliminate poverty. Yet the City Council has failed to nominate members to the Commission that issues Professional Assessments, even though the work of this body is predominantly technical and aimed at improving Mostar's urban-planning process.

Holding up the work of the Professional Assessments Commission will only serve to obstruct the effective functioning of the city administration, preventing it from addressing the unregulated building that has blighted the city's landscape and ensuring that future building permits are issued in a transparent manner in the interests of all residents, not only a few well-connected companies.

I do not believe anyone seriously believes that the urban-planning process is a matter of "national interest". Nor can "national interest" be trotted out to explain the mismanagement of HRT – bringing the station to a position of technical, administrative and financial collapse, at which point Croat politicians suddenly discovered that it had an important role in maintaining Croats' cultural identity.

It is against this backdrop – of failing to deliver services to citizens – that the political parties recently launched an initiative to increase the number of ministries in the Herzegovina-Neretva Cantonal government. More ministries will make it easier to allocate positions along party and national lines. But to suggest that this initiative is inspired by a desire to increase efficiency is both ridiculous and impertinent.

In the face of this, citizens ask why the international community is not stepping in and when the High Representative will intervene? In response, I have a question of my own. Why don't the citizens of Mostar and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton intervene? Businessmen, trades union activists, journalists, intellectuals and youth leaders could all take these matters in hand. Politicians who have been alienated by the corruption and incompetence of the party machines could and should also take a stand.

Mostar has a lot of non-governmental organisations, but there is, as yet, no citizens' movement for a better Mostar. Where are the young people who should be flocking to join it for the sake of their own future? If there was a groundswell of pressure for change, it might even be possible to call early municipal elections to choose politicians willing to work for a better future for everybody in Mostar.

As long as the citizens of Mostar fail to take responsibility for their own future, my interventions will achieve little more than head off catastrophe. I can and will continue to do this, but my efforts alone will not create sustainable solutions. If I act, I can make short-term improvements. If the citizens of Mostar act, they can achieve long-term progress. That is the lesson of Mostar during the past 13 years and it's one the entire country needs to learn.

Christian Schwarz-Schilling is the international community's High Representative and the European Union's Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.