

Bennett: In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Hands-Off Approach is Better



Rather than depend on outside intervention, Bosnia and Herzegovina must govern itself, wrote Chris Bennett, Communications Director of the Office of the High Representative and EU Special Representative, in a commentary published by *The Guardian* today.

The current High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, believes in local ownership and empowering domestic institutions and leaders to take responsibility for their country's future.

"It is tempting to intervene when things appear to be going badly, to give the impression of progress. But that would be a false impression. It takes courage not to intervene under such circumstances," the OHR and EUSR Communications Director wrote.

"The most irresponsible policy would be one of continuous intervention until the day the office he heads closes and the extraordinary powers he possesses are no more. Mr Schwarz-Schilling has stood firm in addressing the long-term reality and avoiding short-term fixes," Mr Bennett wrote.

Such an approach has made it possible to form an accurate assessment of conditions in the country, so as to design the

appropriate instruments and policies to assist Bosnia 's development.

The OHR and EUSR Communications Director also pointed to a series of positive results achieved over the past year, for which local authorities deserved credit: the introduction and implementation of VAT, defence reforms and membership of NATO's Partnership for Peace, trade negotiations and Central European Free Trade Agreement membership, and the holding of elections and government formation with minimal international intervention.

In response to an erroneous report in *The Guardian* alleging that Mr Schwarz-Schilling had resigned, Mr Bennett explained that the High Representative and EU Special Representative had decided not to seek a renewal of his mandate, so as to give the international community maximum time to determine the way forward for Bosnia and Herzegovina 's post-war recovery and Euro-Atlantic integration.

"Although Mr Schwarz-Schilling's critics are crowing, they will be disappointed by the next high representative, who will take over where Mr Schwarz-Schilling left off," Mr Bennett concluded. "There will be no return to interventionism."

The text of the OHR and EUSR Communication Director's commentary can be found at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.