Article by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH”Free Speech and Fair Reporting”

Free Speech and Fair Reporting

The old regime in former Yugoslavia armed itself with draconian powers to control and sometimes muzzle the media. Journalists who criticised the government risked paying a heavy price. With the coming of democracy, the criminalisation of criticism ended. But in the absence of adequate libel and slander laws, fair and objective reporting was frequently a casualty of this freedom.

During the past decade, the international community has sought to assist the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to protect free speech while at the same time obliging media to report the news in a professional and unbiased way. The Communications Regulatory Agency, for example, is now up and running. Its job is to regulate the development of professional and viable commercial and public broadcasters, protect freedom of expression and review complaints about irresponsible or malicious reporting.

Responding to what it sees as unfair coverage by BHT1, the government of Republika Srpska threatened to freeze the broadcaster out of the information loop. It may or may not have a point, but other mechanisms exist to provide redress. Thankfully, the government of Republika Srpska now appears to have stepped back from so confrontational an approach. No one wants a return to the old system, where the authorities punished media that displeased them. That is not the

democratic way.

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