Free Speech and Fair Reporting

The High Representative and the European Union’s Special Representative inBosnia and Herzegovina, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, welcomed the announcement of the Republika Srpska government to give up its boycott of BHT1 in a newspaper article published today.

“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,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote in *Euroblic*. “It may or may not have a point, but other mechanisms exist to provide redress.”

In the old regime in former Yugoslavia , which had armed itself with draconian powers to control the media, journalists risked paying a heave price for criticizing the government.

In an effort to promote fair an objective reporting, 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 High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote.

As a result of these efforts, mechanisms now exist to provide redress in the case of unfair reporting. The Communications Regulatory Agency, for instance, regulates the development of professional and viable commercial and public broadcasters, protects freedom of expression and reviews complaints about irresponsible or malicious reporting.

The High Representative and the European Union’s Special Representative expressed his satisfaction that the government of Republika Srpska now appears to have stepped back from its

original confrontational approach.

“No one wants a return to the old system, where the authorities punished media that displeased them,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling concluded. “That is not the democratic way.”

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