

Letter to the Guardian by Julian Braithwaite, Director of Communications

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THE GUARDIAN
LONDON

Dear Sir,

Your article of 5 July by Ian Traynor ("Ashdown 'running Bosnia like a Raj'") gives extensive and undue prominence to a preposterous comparison between the work of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and colonialism in India. Your reporter has also compounded the mistake by misrepresenting my views.

The motives behind the European Stability Initiative's report quoted in your article appear to have more to do with self-promotion than presenting the facts. The vicious war that ended in 1995 left 250,000 dead, half Bosnia's population homeless, and the country's institutions in ruins. Throughout the war, many Bosnians pleaded for international intervention and if anything criticized us for not doing more. When the war ended, the Office of the High Representative that Mr Ashdown heads was established with the support of the Bosnian authorities. Since then, the international community has put billions of dollars into the country's reconstruction. Today there is a domestic government in Bosnia, and the foundations of a modern European state, precisely because of the international community.

Mr Ashdown is determined to wind down the OHR. He is the first High Representative to draw up a Mission Implementation

Plan setting out how the OHR's responsibility will be transferred to Bosnian institutions. He has already closed one department in the OHR, and is in the process of closing another. He has brought in significant numbers of Bosnians to replace internationals in this transition. And many of the most significant reforms in crucial fields like the Rule of Law have been passed by Bosnia's own parliaments, not by the decree of the High Representative.

In short, much of the ESI's report is inaccurate and out of date. Regrettably, it can only be described as irresponsible attention-seeking, and does nothing to contribute to the process of helping Bosnia become a sustainable European democracy after the horrors of its recent past.

Your correspondent also failed to balance his report by correctly setting out the OHR's position. The OHR's Mission Implementation Plan was on the OHR's website for him to read, but he did not. And my conversation with him was completely misrepresented. I never said Bosnia's politicians were venal and corrupt, which is as insulting to the vast majority of them as it is offensive to me.

JULIAN BRAITHWAITE
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