Schwarz-Schilling: New Challenges Demand New Responses

The resilience and determination of ordinary citizens in the face of material administrative and political obstacles have helped put Bosnia and Herzegovina back on its feet, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in his weekly column, which appeared today.

“I’m not going to argue that everything is rosy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It isn’t,” the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote in Dnevni avaz, Nezavisne novine and Vecernji list. “But huge progress has been made since 1995 – and this progress has been a direct result of pragmatism and compromise, two political options much criticised in the media and among large numbers of elected representatives.”

Mr Schwarz-Schilling went on to point out that the many achievements of the peace process “have not been the work of those politicians who confuse mud-slinging with policy-making and obduracy with consistency” and suggested that: “Politicians would do well to take a lead from the pragmatism of their fellow citizens to come up with new responses to new challenges.”

In his article, the High Representative and EU Special Representative contrasted today’s conditions in both Bihac and Drvar with those when he first visited the municipalities 12 and 10 years ago respectively.

Malnutrition was rife and disease taking a heavy toll in Bihac in 1995 when Mr Schwarz-Schilling entered the municipality

with the first convoy of humanitarian aid to make it into the area at the end of the war. This week, he was able to visit a dairy and to discuss with managers and workers the challenges they face in turning their business into a regional concern that creates more jobs and generates more export income for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Drvar in 1997, Mr Schwarz-Schilling explained patiently and at great length to the then deputy mayor that refugee return was a basic human right. He spoke with the deputy mayor because the mayor wouldn't see him and gave orders for him to be prevented from entering the municipality building. This week in the Municipal Assembly, the High Representative and EU Special Representative engaged in a dialogue about infrastructure investment and economic regeneration.

"The issues I and others addressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina a decade and more ago are different from the issues I have had to address as High Representative," Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote. "I am grateful for this – because it means that the country has moved on. It could have moved faster, of course – and it will move faster if more of its leaders begin to understand that coming up with the same responses to changing problems does not represent consistency, but living in the past.

"Since the beginning of my political career, I have concentrated on getting things done. It is the only thing of value in politics," Mr Schwarz-Schilling continued. "You cannot do everything that you want to do – the important thing is to do as much as you possibly can."

In his article, the High Representative and EU Special Representative wrote that it had been a privilege to live and work in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the difficult days immediately after the war because he saw at first hand the extraordinary courage and moral integrity of citizens who were determined to rebuild and who had confidence in the future of

what was then a broken country.

“As High Representative, I have sought to keep faith with those citizens – not by living in the past but by working with those who are developing new responses for the present, and the future,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling concluded. “And I will continue to work for that future.”

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