Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Mostar Matters”

All of us are aware that Mostar is a powerful symbol, and not just inside Bosnia and Herzegovina . It’s a city whose significance is understood throughout the world. The Old Bridge represents timeless truths about the possibility of peaceful and creative coexistence among different communities.

All of us are equally aware that Mostar in recent years has encapsulated much that is regrettable about Bosnia and Herzegovina . In the past decade, the city has illustrated, in a consistently dispiriting way, the misery that can be inflicted on citizens when their political representatives substitute bickering for constructive debate and opt for intransigence over getting things done.

Of course, this isn’t exclusively a Mostar problem. There are municipalities throughout the country where leaders have wasted time and resources on empty rhetoric and chronic feuding instead of making life better for the people they claim to represent. But the present difficulties being experienced by the people of Mostar put the shortcomings of the city’s political leadership into sharp and painful relief.

The city administration is dysfunctional because for more than a decade it has been overstaffed and poorly organised; public utilities are inadequate; and other institutions that should be providing services to citizens are unsatisfactory.

Some Mostar leaders, including Mayor Ljubo Beslic and President of the City Council Murat Coric, have tried to

address these problems. A majority of the city's politicians have not. The two parties that have shared power in Mostar for the past ten years, the SDA and the HDZ, have served their people poorly.

On 23 June, after its meeting in Sarajevo , the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) noted that progress towards unifying Mostar in the two years since the introduction of the City Statute had not been satisfactory. The PIC called on me to take decisive action, if necessary, to move the process forward. Since then I have tried to facilitate a solution to some of the key problems that are – completely unnecessarily – bedevilling the life of Mostar citizens.

Several weeks ago I made it clear to the various Mostar leaders that they must begin implementing, without any further delay, solutions to the problems of the utilities, the civil service, HTV and other local institutions.

During the summer, I received promises of constructive and pragmatic action from Mostar politicians, and some progress has been made on the establishment of the method and timeframe for downsizing the surplus workers and filling the civil-service positions. On the other outstanding issues, however, nothing has been done.

This is unacceptable. These issues cannot be put off forever. Politicians must understand that they do not fail in a vacuum. Their failure hurts other people. In the case of Mostar, their failure is hurting tens of thousands of people.

Mostar's politicians have had well over two years to resolve these problems. They have failed. I am left with no option but to compensate for that failure by taking direct action. Later today, therefore, I will be announcing steps to resolve the present impasse regarding the public utilities, HTV, and other institutions in Mostar.

Mostar matters – it matters most to the people who live there, but it also matters to people in the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it matters beyond this country. This is a city that *can* prosper; it *can* once again be home to a vibrant and inclusive urban community. The steps that I am about to take are designed to surmount obstacles to make that possibility a reality.

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