

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Former Police Officers Have a Right to Demonstrate”

This Sunday, former police officers who were denied certification by the International Police Task Force (IPTF) before 2003 will demonstrate in Sarajevo demanding a review of their cases.

I support their right to demonstrate, even if they do so in front of my office. I supported their request for a review in principle before I became High Representative and EU Special Representative. And I have taken up their case and argued on their behalf in international forums, since taking up my appointment in February.

The IPTF operated over an extended period of time and it operated well. Its task was huge. No one who was in Bosnia and Herzegovina during and immediately after the war will take issue with the fact that the integrity and efficiency of the police forces had been woefully undermined by political interference, ethnic stratification and endemic corruption. This had to be tackled and it had to be tackled robustly.

The IPTF, under the mandate of the United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was tasked with examining the record and suitability of every single police officer and certifying those whose conduct and qualifications merited a continuing claim to the public trust.

No one disputes the fact that this task was necessary. Nor does anyone believe that the IPTF process was faultless. It

was undertaken in difficult circumstances, often without adequate cooperation from police authorities and police officers themselves.

Despite the circumstances, the IPTF succeeded in identifying a large number of individuals who were not suitable to work in law-enforcement agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina . By doing this it succeeded in raising the credibility of the police throughout the country and enhanced their capacity to do their job.

The issue now is not whether the IPTF process was legitimate – it was. The issue is whether those individuals who were denied certification by the IPTF should have the possibility of having their cases reviewed by the United Nations. I believe, and have always believed, that the United Nations should seriously consider establishing such a review mechanism.

Unfortunately, however, my view on this matter is not the one that counts. Neither the Office of the High Representative nor the EU Police Mission can provide for a review process for individuals denied certification. We do not have responsibility for the IPTF and its legacy. That rests with the United Nations. It is therefore for the United Nations to act.

In April this year during my first briefing as High Representative to the UN Security Council, I took up the case of the decertified officers, calling on the Security Council to respond positively to the calls for a review mechanism to be established. Over the summer, I dispatched members of my staff to New York to discuss the issue in detail with UN officials. Again at the start of November, I raised the matter, specifically and at length, with the Security Council.

Certifying police officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina was something that had to be done. It had to be done as quickly as possible and it had to be done vigorously. The process

delivered real benefits to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina . However, this does not mean that the United Nations should not consider establishing a process for reviewing some of these cases.

I am still hoping that the United Nations will act and consider establishing a review mechanism that is just and fair. Since Sunday's demonstration will coincide with UN Human Rights Day, it may provide a golden opportunity for the United Nations to resolve this issue.

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