Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Less Is More”

On 23 June, the international community announced that in the middle of 2007 it will end its direct supervision ofBosnia and Herzegovina ’s post-war recovery, nearly 12 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement brought the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina to a close.

The Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council, the body responsible for supervising implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, made the announcement in Sarajevo. Specifically, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which has coordinated the work of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and acted as the driving force behind the country’s post-war rehabilitation, will close on 30 June 2007.

Although this decision had been widely heralded, there has been a persistent belief – particularly inside Bosnia and Herzegovina , but also in other countries – that the international engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina would continue in its present form for years to come.

The reasons for this are not hard to find.

The OHR has been a success.

The so-called “Bonn Powers”, instituted at the end of 1997, gave the High Representative the authority to dismiss officials found to be obstructing implementation of the peace agreement, and to impose legislation that will ensure peace

and stability. This has allowed the OHR to reduce obstruction and help take Bosnia and Herzegovina to a point where it is now negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union, the first step towards eventual EU membership.

So, why change something that is working?

The simple answer is that a democracy that is protected and consolidated through the use of executive powers granted to an extraneous institution cannot develop the necessary inner strength to sustain itself.

If Bosnia and Herzegovina is to complete its journey to full post-war rehabilitation and Euro-Atlantic integration, it must travel the remainder of the way under its own steam.

Yet there has been strong pressure to prolong a system that has delivered such impressive results. Since 1996, more than a million citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina displaced by the war have had the chance to return to their homes; the country has held a succession of elections and evolved a political dialogue which, though fractious and at times exasperatingly convoluted, has replaced the destructive chauvinism of the early 1990s; economic growth has exceeded five per cent annually for the past four years.

But Bosnia and Herzegovina has gone as far as it can go under international tutelage. Already two years ago, the European Union made it clear that legislation required to launch the SAA would only be considered acceptable if enacted by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina on their own. It could not be imposed by the High Representative.

Since then, a swathe of difficult reform laws – including laws leading to the streamlining of the armed forces and the successful introduction of value added tax at the start of this year – have been enacted by the country's parliamentary assemblies.

In my five months as High Representative, I have used the Bonn Powers to act in place of parliament as little as possible: once to amend the criminal procedure code to facilitate the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and once to prevent the unregulated sale of state property.

I have also appointed a small number of officials, where further delay in their appointment would have undermined the smooth administration of the legal and fiscal systems, and, continuing a practice inaugurated by my predecessor, I have allowed individuals removed from office at an earlier stage of the peace process by other High Representatives to return to public life.

Despite pressure, I have refused to intervene wholesale in the running of Bosnia and Herzegovina , because this would be counter-productive.

Bosnia and Herzegovina must now solve its own problems.

The international community will remain engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the continued presence of EUFOR, the EU Police Mission, NATO and other international actors. Indeed, the European Union's engagement will be reinforced, by enhancing the role of the EU Special Representative and by moving forward with the SAA process. I intend to serve as High Representative until the closure of the Office and then to remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina in my other capacity, as EU Special Representative.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now getting back on its feet, with the political and institutional resources to resume full sovereignty. As far as international engagement is concerned, less is very definitely more.

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Christian Schwarz-Schilling is the international community's High Representative

and the European Union’s Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.