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## **DISCOURAGING RESPONSIBILITY IN BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: THE CONTINUING ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

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**Key Words:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, Domestic Responsibility, International Community, Reforms, Political Development, Political Participation.

**Abstract:** In recent times, the international organisations that have overseen the political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) since the Dayton Agreement have increased their calls for the country's leaders to assume domestic responsibility and act with political 'maturity' in tackling the issues faced by BiH as it seeks to join the European Union. However, the international community continues to exercise substantial power and influence over the country and, because of this, may inhibit the ability of BiH's leaders to effectively run the country and act with political responsibility. This paper examines the relationship between the BiH political elite and the international community and attempts to discern the affects of this relationship on the overall political health of the country, discussing whether a substantial reduction in the authority of the international community would assist the political development of BiH.

**Introduction:** Writing in June 2008, the BBC foreign correspondent Humphrey Hawksley lauded Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH) for its reforms, citing the country as a model for the development of other conflict-ridden states. BiH, according to Hawksley, was "evidence of what United States leadership can achieve, that over time the West's intervention has been marked not by failure

but success”.<sup>1</sup> Coming after it had been announced that BiH was to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union (EU), this upbeat assessment was somewhat understandable. To the casual outside observer, the SAA locked BiH onto a path of EU membership – the guarantee of future peace and prosperity.

The first half of 2008 was marked, according to the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) – the cohort of international officials who give political direction to the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the powerful international authority overseeing BiH – by “significant progress”.<sup>2</sup> At its annual summit in Bucharest at the start of April, NATO launched an “Intensive Dialogue” Programme with BiH, and the country edged closer to full membership of the military alliance. Also in April, BiH political representatives, after over four years of negotiations, finally agreed to a deal on reforming the country’s police structures. The deal on police reform cleared the last remaining obstacle to BiH signing the aforementioned SAA with the EU, with the signing ceremony subsequently taking place in Luxembourg on 16 June. In the EU accession process, the SAA, as mentioned, is viewed as a key milestone, obliging BiH to harmonise its legal and economic system with EU norms, while the EU will provide financial assistance to the country in support of this process.

According to the PIC Steering Board, the main objective of the international community’s<sup>3</sup> continuing presence in BiH is for the country to be a “peaceful, viable state irreversibly on course for European integration”.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on European integration and the increasing role of the EU as a driving factor in BiH politics through the accession process has led to the international community deciding to fully transform the powerful OHR into an Office of the EU Special Representative (EUSR). Since 2002, the High Representative has acted in this double-hatted capacity of also serving as the coordinator for EU policy objectives in the country. Conscious of the widespread criticism, both from inside and outside BiH (see for example Chandler 2000; 2005), of the undemocratic and authoritarian character of the OHR’s powers and actions in the country (removing democratically elected representatives and imposing legislation, for example), and the realisation that it may not be practical for BiH to enter the EU while the OHR is present in its current form, EU integration gives the international community an exit strategy of sorts from the country, or, alternatively, an opportunity to reconfigure its presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Humphrey Hawksley, ‘Rid of Violence, a Reforming Bosnia Emerges as a Model’, *Bosnia Daily*, 18 June 2008 p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Communiqué of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council, 25 June 2008. The Russian representative on the PIC Steering Board did not share the views of his colleagues on the Board and Russia disassociated itself with the Communiqué.

<sup>3</sup> I have used the term ‘international community’ as shorthand for the countries and international organisations (some mandated by the Dayton Agreement) that significantly influence the political life of the RS and BiH. It is undoubtedly a problematic term, however, as it is often used in BiH for the same purpose, I have employed it here.

<sup>4</sup> See Note 2.

The transition from OHR to EUSR is likely to do away with the 'Bonn Powers', the OHR's previously mentioned authority to remove officials who are judged to be in violation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and to impose legislation, and will represent a further scaling-down in the international community's presence in the country – EUFOR, OSCE, UNHCR and the IMF, for example, have all reduced or are in the process of reducing the size of their operations in the country. In order for the transition to an EUSR to be completed, the PIC Steering Board and OHR have devised a set of benchmarks that the domestic political representatives of BiH must meet. Two conditions have been laid down – namely that BiH sign an SAA with EU (which has been met) and a positive assessment of the situation in BiH by the PIC Steering Board based on full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement. In addition to these two conditions, five "objectives" also have to be met – an agreement on the apportionment of property between the state and other levels of government; an agreement on the issue of defence property; completion of the Brcko Final Award; fiscal sustainability; and the entrenchment of the rule of law.

Although appearing to have made "significant progress" during the first half of 2008, the real extent of change as desired by the international community may be somewhat less than that. On closer inspection, it is hard to see the deal reached on police reform as anything other than a fudge. The issue of police reform was largely a creation of the OHR, during Paddy Ashdown's tenure as High Representative, which pushed for the issue to be included in the conditions during the EU accession process. No other country, including Serbia, has had to reform its police structures during the EU accession process.<sup>5</sup> As none of the ethno-national political blocs in BiH would back down on the issue after four years of fruitless discussions, the deal reached in April merely basis police reform on the outcome of future negotiations on constitutional reform, yet to be scheduled. However, the deal, for all its shortcomings, gave the international community and the local representatives a way out of the artificially created impasse, for the moment, facilitating the signing of the SAA and the appearance of substantive progress. Furthermore, ethno-national divisions still define the character of the political dispensation in the country. Serb representatives from the Republika Srpska (RS) entity continue to protect the authorities and powers of the entity, while Bosniak politicians call for a strengthening of the central BiH state. In contrast, Croat officials would like to see the creation of a third "Croat-run" entity in the country. An apparent increase in ethno-national rhetoric in the run up to the municipal elections of October 2008 led to numerous international officials voicing their concern at the perceived deterioration in relations within BiH. Unemployment continues to be a chronic problem pervading BiH society while corruption is also a serious issue. The arrest of Radovan Karadžić in July 2008 was welcomed by the High

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<sup>5</sup> For more details see the European Stability Initiative's report *The Worst in Class; How the International Protectorate Hurts the European Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 8 November 2007.

Representative as “positive for BiH and for the whole region”.<sup>6</sup> The arrest may have represented a positive signal from Serbia on cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, however, for BiH, the limited reactions served, if anything, to reinforce the divisions in the country with the majority of citizens most interested in the intricacies of Karadžić’s bizarre life in Belgrade.

Despite the abovementioned realities, a reconfiguration in the presence and role of the international community in BiH seems inevitable, whether the progress to apparently justify such reconfiguration is actual or contrived. Part of the transformation, and the scaling back of the OHR, is the transition to “local ownership” – BiH elected representatives are apparently to take full responsibility for devising and implementing policy and the political direction of the country. The transfer to local ownership has been discussed in conjunction with the closure of the OHR for the past number of years, particularly as the powers invested in the OHR became, over time, more difficult to justify. After the much criticised rule of High Representative Ashdown, his successor, Christian Schwarz-Schilling adopted a less interfering approach, allowing the domestic elected representatives to somewhat manage the pace of reforms. Unfortunately, this pace was rather too slow for the liking of the PIC Steering Board with the benchmarks it had set out – such as police and constitutional reform – for the OHR’s transition not reached. Schwarz-Schilling’s tenure as High Representative was cut short, replaced in the summer of 2007 by the Slovak diplomat Miroslav Lajčák, and the OHR’s transition/closure postponed. The signing of the SAA has, however, brought the OHR’s transition/closure nearer, although High Representative Lajčák has stated that “OHR transition would not take place at any price”.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, a decision on closing the OHR was expected to be announced at the PIC Steering Board’s meeting in Sarajevo in November 2008 or, at the latest, by the following spring. In preparation for the transition, and the handover of authority the transition apparently involves, representatives of the international community have called on BiH politicians to become more “responsible”, not only to assume the powers of running the country but also the responsibilities.

### **Calls for Domestic Responsibility**

In an interview with the EU Observer in March 2008, High Representative Lajčák stated that the “time is coming for BiH to take over responsibility for its own future”.<sup>8</sup> A few months later, Lajčák elaborated on the intentions of the international community, stating that “after 13 years of our presence, we are thinking about entrusting our local partners with more responsibilities. Instead

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Arrest Offers Fresh Start for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans’, OHR Press Release, 22 July 2008.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Lajčák meets Lagumdžija’, OHR Press Release, 11 August 2008.

<sup>8</sup> ‘EU image in Bosnia intact, says international envoy’, Elitsa Vucheva, EU Observer, 5 March 2008, available at [www.euobserver.com](http://www.euobserver.com)

of macro-managing the country, we are here to help them, to facilitate, to guide, and of course, to act every time there are threats to the positive developments in this country".<sup>9</sup> US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, echoed this call, noting that she thought "Bosnians have got to take more responsibility for turning themselves into a normal country".<sup>10</sup> Yet BiH politicians are, often with a degree of accuracy (as in most countries), lambasted by international officials in the country for being corrupt, inefficient, obstinate and immature, obsessed with national issues and blocking much needed reforms. In June 2008, a statement from Lajčák's office observed that "some politicians in this country are not ready to cooperate with their fellow citizens...and they are unwilling to assume responsibility for running this country. The High Representative and EU Special Representative particularly wishes to point out that the inflammatory rhetoric...represents the greatest obstacle to fulfilling one of two political requirements for closure of OHR and its transition into the Office of the EU Special Representative, and that is a positive evaluation of the situation in BiH by the PIC... (the High Representative) expects that citizens of BiH will not allow to be drawn into this manipulation that has only one purpose, which is to divert attention from issues that are of crucial importance for them in this country, such as the European future, new jobs, fight against corruption and poverty, and increasing accountability of elected politicians".<sup>11</sup> The shortcomings of the BiH political elite had also been pointed out by Lajčák a month earlier, stating that "what they (BiH politicians) know is to play with emotions and fears. Something like that exists in European politics as well, but in a much lesser extent, unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina where that is all the politics is about... Politicians have to feel responsible and accountable... Until we have that, as long as the politicians, due to the lack of public involvement, see the citizens merely as a voting instrument, instead of seeing them as a corrective, it will not get much better".<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, in August 2008 Lajčák again reiterated his intention to entrust political responsibility unto domestic representatives, noting that "the period of international intervention in internal matters of BiH has passed... The international community is not ready to impose, but is set to assist. The main burden of responsibility in a country such as BiH should be taken by domestic politicians and this is the stand of the international community".<sup>13</sup>

Other international commentators have lobbied against any significant diminution in the powers of the OHR/EUSR and international community. The United States Institute for Peace, for example, called, in June 2008, for "an active, empowered EU Special Representative, along with continued intensive international engagement from the U.S. and key allies" and has advocated that

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<sup>9</sup> 'New Horizons in Western Balkans', *Bosnia Daily*, 25 July 2008, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> 'Bosnia Needs to Reform its Constitution: Rice', *Bosnia Daily*, 31 March 2008, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> 'Nationalist Rhetoric Prevents Healthy Political Atmosphere', OHR Press Release, 3 June 2008.

<sup>12</sup> 'Competition between the Entities and Neglecting the State Will Not Get You Far', *Bosnia Daily*, 23 May 2008, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> 'Issues of Domestic Players', *Bosnia Daily*, 25 August 2008, p. 7.

the EUSR “must be specifically charged with publicly identifying which actors are responsible for obstructing progress and recommending corrective steps, up to their removal from office...the EUSR should be able to proffer draft legislation...it remains imperative that the international community set – and have the power to enforce – red lines”.<sup>14</sup> Former High Representative Ashdown has also backed the maintenance of a strong international presence, stating after the arrest of Karadžić that efforts aimed at empowering BiH politicians were down to the “weariness and misjudgement of the international community” and that “Brussels must toughen up its conditionality, support its instruments on the ground, resist attempts to undermine the Bosnian state, insist on constitutional reform to make Bosnia more functional and tackle corruption which is becoming ever more embedded”.<sup>15</sup> Lajčák’s unwillingness to use the Bonn Powers to their full extent and remove BiH’s current political leaders has also drawn criticism with the Ljubljana-based IFIMES political think-tank commenting that “if he continues with his (in)activities in BiH, Lajčák has a good chance to join the list of bad and very bad high representatives in BiH”.<sup>16</sup>

In order to handle increasing ownership, BiH politicians have been told to change their ways, become more responsible and promptly implement the desired reforms and policies of the international community. According to Lajčák’s deputy at the OHR, the American diplomat Raffi Gregorian, “how long the OHR will stay depends on local politicians and their behaviour”.<sup>17</sup> The US Ambassador to BiH, Charles English, in a speech in Sarajevo in May 2008 noted that “Bosnia has taken a step closer to Euro-Atlantic structures, but the responsibilities of Bosnia’s leaders have now become correspondingly greater... The opportunity offered to Bosnia by NATO and the EU must be seized by your country’s political leaders. Their decisions will determine where Bosnia finds itself five, ten, or fifteen years from now. Will Bosnia be encircled by Europe? Will its neighbours move forward while Bosnia remains trapped in stagnation or worse? The answers to these questions depend on whether your country’s political leaders can focus on those issues that can bring the country together and that can move it forward... Not a single Bosnian citizen, of any ethnicity or entity, benefited from the recent, wasteful cycle of artificial crises engineered by political leaders or the prolonged stalemate over police reform. Much time has been unnecessarily lost. Bosnia desperately needs statesmanship”.<sup>18</sup> Not only are BiH politicians called on to be “more responsible”, they are also requested by the international community to become more responsive to the needs of citizens.

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Making Bosnia Work; Why EU Accession is Not Enough’, Edward P. Joseph and R. Bruce Hitchner, *USI Peace Briefing*, United States Institute of Peace, June 2008, available at [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

<sup>15</sup> ‘Europe Needs a Wake-Up Call, Bosnia is on the Edge Again’, *Bosnia Daily*, 28 July 2008, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Has Janez Janša Recognised the Statehood of Republika Srpska?* International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies, 2 July 2008, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Russia Wants Bosnia’s Top Envoy Out’, *Balkan Insight*, 30 June 2008, available from [www.balkaninsight.com](http://www.balkaninsight.com)

<sup>18</sup> ‘Political Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina’. Speech by United States Ambassador to BiH Charles English at the Circle 99 session, 11 May 2008, available at [www.sarajevo.usembassy.gov](http://www.sarajevo.usembassy.gov)

Nationalist “rhetoric” is to be abandoned, replaced by practical solutions to the everyday problems of BiH citizens. As Lajčák put it, “nationalism...is used by all sides to hide the simple fact that politicians regularly fail, and often even fail to try, to deliver concrete benefits for their citizens”.<sup>19</sup>

The main solution, of course, according to the international officials, is to implement the EU accession requirements and related reforms. They offer a choice for BiH and its political leaders, a choice between joining the EU and NATO (Euro-Atlantic integration) or remaining in poverty and isolation. According to Lajčák, “political parties in BiH are facing a historic choice – European integration and a relatively better future for BiH and its citizens or stagnation and self-isolation from Europe, without any sign of progress”.<sup>20</sup> For the citizens of BiH, he had this message: “if your politicians are not capable of leading you towards the EU, then you should complain to all those who are not voting for European laws. You cannot have one without the other. We are either part of the European family, or we are not”.<sup>21</sup> Lajčák’s sentiments were echoed by the aforementioned Ambassador English who stated that “if BiH is to have a realistic hope of joining NATO or the EU, its political leadership must work much, much harder. They cannot spend three years exchanging bitter polemics over each reform or devote their energies to narrow ethnic agendas. Bosnia is at a crossroads, and the paths are clearly defined. The path to Europe will be the politically more difficult path, to be sure, but it is the only path to a peaceful, prosperous future. If Bosnia’s leaders choose their more foot worn, familiar, and traditional path, that is to say if they continue to use the reform process as a battleground for narrow ethnic agendas, no one, not the United States, nor the EU, nor any other international institution will be able to prevent them from betraying the hopes of Bosnia’s citizens”.<sup>22</sup> The “path to Europe” – and the apparent connected benefits for BiH citizens, then, appears to be the only way in which responsibility, whatever real weight that term actually has in this scenario, and ownership will be transferred to locally elected officials. Both BiH citizens and the political elite favour EU membership and the associated benefits, in particular visa-free travel, and share this goal of the international community. Election posters on the streets of Sarajevo prior to the municipal elections of October 2008, for example, often included an EU flag along with slogans such as “first on the road to the EU”, “go to Europe with us” and “let’s go (to the EU)”. However, this goal does not seem to be the top priority of the BiH political elite, with the Serb officials in the RS entity, for example, mainly concerned with protecting the entity’s status. Nonetheless, it is a priority, and BiH politicians of all ethno-nationalities favour progress towards EU integration.

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Lajčák: EU Integration Addresses Fundamental Issues of BiH Statehood’, OHR Press Release, 21 May 2008.

<sup>20</sup> ‘EU Ready to Reward BiH’, *Nezavisne Novine*, 2 April 2008, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Note 18.

## Discouraging Responsibility and Responsiveness

Despite the calls of the OHR/EUSR and others for the BiH political elite to grasp the opportunity now provided and assume responsible, responsive governance of the country, the international community has, to date, arguably discouraged the emergence of a responsible and responsive political elite through its actions. Rather than facilitating a healthy body politic and an accountable political elite, well positioned to manage a “transition to ownership”, BiH’s external managers, through their continuing significant influence in the country, apparently contradict their stated intentions and impede political development and democratisation.

The influence of the OHR/EUSR and international community has frustrated some BiH politicians, especially those in the RS. Far from being free to implement and develop their own policies and legislation, as apparently mandated to do via competitive elections, the RS authorities are subjected to external demands and pressures. According to Igor Radojičić, a leading figure in the foremost RS party, the SNSD, and chair of the RS National Assembly (RSNA), “those stories, defence reform, security services reform, indirect taxation reform, all of them forced by the international community and being on the table as a result of the international agenda, so this is not the agenda of domestic politicians, or local political bodies, parliamentarians or someone else, but the agenda of the international community”.<sup>23</sup> The policy agenda of the international community has meant that certain other policies and decisions, considered critical by citizens and the local representatives were demoted and pushed to one side. Radojičić gave the following example: “This story about police reform. We started this session of the (RS National) Assembly yesterday, with several important questions on the table. Almost all of yesterday there was a discussion about education because there was a strike by teachers, they had one warning strike yesterday in the RS and they announced that they will start a strike, an open strike, in the next several days or weeks if the National Assembly and the Government will not increase their salary. We had a discussion yesterday, we were not able to reach a conclusion last night, so we waited for some conclusion this morning, but the police reform, because of the deadline imposed, is on the top (of the agenda), and we have to break the session of the National Assembly and put the problem of education to one side... Who knows when we will be able to continue discussing education”.<sup>24</sup> Radojičić further added that “it is very difficult to find a session of the National Assembly or of the Bosnian Parliament without several laws or debates where there is no precise request of the international community.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interview conducted with author in Banja Luka, 13 September 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



Another member of the RSNA, Branislav Borenović of the PDP, reinforces the above view, noting that “the OHR has a very large influence, instead of promoting local politicians to be self-sustainable, local politicians were depending on what the OHR can accept or cannot accept. We still have this situation after twelve years. They were very deeply involved in the decisions of the local politicians. Anything that you wanted to decide – it’s as if you had to get a license from the OHR”.<sup>26</sup> OHR/EUSR officials have acknowledged their influence on the legislation proposed to, and enacted by, BiH politicians: “There were cases where we prepared the laws and forwarded it to them to adopt. For instance, every year they start with a legislation agenda, they send it to us and we review it and also suggest that they should put some other laws in”.<sup>27</sup> Despite their expressed desire to play a less intrusive role in the governance of BiH, the OHR/EUSR continues, for example, to monitor and vet the legislation passing through the entity and state parliaments, requesting in April 2008, for instance, that the RS Draft Law on Conflict of Interests be withdrawn. OSCE and OHR/EUSR pressure also forced the RS leadership to withdraw its plans to change how municipal mayors were elected and to agree on changing the BiH Election Law to decrease the likelihood of a Serb becoming mayor of Srebrenica at the October 2008 local elections. Furthermore in the Srebrenica municipality, the international community’s Special Representative for the town, former US ambassador to BiH, Clifford Bond, became involved in the selection process for the main Bosniak candidate, publicly noting his disapproval of the chosen candidate and questioning his ability to run the municipality.<sup>28</sup> While some of these interventions may well be welcome, it is an indication of the sustained influence of certain international organisations unlikely to diminish with the scrapping of the Bonn Powers alone.

Issues such as police and constitutional reforms pushed by the international community have, according to Radojičić, merely served to fan the nationalist grandiloquence so criticised by international officials in BiH. He states that “all the time you have some very political, not economic questions in focus on the top, and this is also very good for the creation of an ‘atmosphere’. In police reform there is an atmosphere – if somebody will dissolve the Republika Srpska or not. A good political question for nationalism. If you discuss privatisation affairs, jobs, employment, it is not so much a question for nationalist parties...but partly due to the international community we permanently discuss questions like police reform, defence reform, security services reform”.<sup>29</sup>

Besides deciding the policy agenda, the influence of the international community has other implications for the local politicians and for the development of democracy. As Radojičić again observed, “to expect from the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview conducted with author in Banja Luka, 3 February 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews conducted with OHR officials, BiH, 2 October 2006.

<sup>28</sup> See ‘Cure for Passion’, Faruk Boric, *Bosnia Daily*, 7 July 2008, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> See Note 23.

government and opposition – both of them to vote ‘yes’, not just on big questions like defence or police (reform), but there are so many smaller problems and every time there is someone from the OHR, from OSCE, from NATO, from World Bank, IMF or somebody else who is pushing some stories, some law, some decision without amendments. It creates a very difficult situation for the government and the opposition: first, you are very passive, you don’t have the ability to present or project your policy, because the proposal, the law, the project decision is already done – ‘take it or leave it’. On the other side, you cannot present your identity for your voters if you are for all the important, even less important, decisions. You have to vote the same as the other parties and this kills the political scene”.<sup>30</sup> Radojičić elaborated on the notion that the international institutions engender a culture of dependency, passivity and irresponsibility, stating that “the majority of (BiH politicians), including the governments, have been waiting for the agenda, for the solutions of the international community... ‘There is somebody else who will do this, we don’t have to push too much’... so the atmosphere, the political scene, is quite passive, and it is necessary to push it to be much more active”.<sup>31</sup>

Former RS President, Dragan Čavić, also believes that the international community needs to take its fair share of the blame for the failings of the BiH political elite, for the lack of responsiveness and accountability. As he noted, “why should we get ourselves into the position where we have to explain to the electorate why did we bring this or that decision? It is much easier to say that the High Representative has decided something”.<sup>32</sup> The vice president of Radojičić’s SNSD, Krstan Simić, concurred with this viewpoint, arguing that while the OHR complete with Bonn Powers was present in BiH, politicians had a “certain alibi, so they could afford to be radical and unrealistic in their demands”,<sup>33</sup> while the respected BiH political analyst, Tanja Topić, has noted that “domestic political leaders use the institution of the OHR as an excuse, they say ‘we would do something but the OHR will not let us’”.<sup>34</sup>

The aforementioned Čavić also feels that the international presence has contributed to public disenchantment with politics, stating that “the international community has the strongest influence, so is it common sense to vote for someone, to give support to someone if they do not decide on something, if the international community decides? And if you make a summary, you have just one conclusion – general apathy”.<sup>35</sup> Radojičić agrees, connecting the strong international presence and its constraint of domestic representatives and policy ideas to apathy and the political disillusionment of citizens. According to Radojičić, the “general conclusions of citizens here will be to think all the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Interview conducted with author in Banski Dvor, Banja Luka, 5 April 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in *Dnevni Avaz*, p.3, 24 June 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Interview conducted with author in Banja Luka, 1 March 2007.

<sup>35</sup> See Note 32.

political parties – there is no difference, they have the same programmes, they have the same problems, they vote the same way, there is no difference. This is the result of this strange pressure of the international community”.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to these claims from Serb representatives of the ill effects of the continued external management of the country, Bosniak politicians, wary of Serb intentions, have called on the OHR/EUSR to retain the authorities it has under the Bonn Powers. Haris Silajdžić, the Bosniak member of the BiH Presidency and leader of the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH), for example, has stated his view that there needs to be “a further engagement of the international community...because...(Serb) rhetoric could turn into concrete actions, in the case of an early departure of the OHR”.<sup>37</sup> The Bosniak Vice President of the RS, SDA representative Adil Osmanović shares this position, noting that “unfortunately, some political organisations would like to see Bosnia and Herzegovina fail in its plans. If the OHR leaves, we will not be protected... The termination of the OHR’s mandate would cause a problem, would make things worse, so it’s better not to limit his mandate and let the process end by itself”.<sup>38</sup> Osmanović also indicated that his party was content in allowing the international community to set the policy agenda, stating that “we are happy for the SDA to go with the opinion of the international community. We expect support from the international community”.<sup>39</sup> Of the three main ethno-national groups, the most consistent support for the OHR and the other significant international organisations has been from Bosniaks, although recently, as the OHR voices its supposed intention to hand over more power to the domestic authorities, Bosniak support has started to dip (while, conversely, support for the OHR has increased in Serb majority areas).<sup>40</sup>

The favourable disposition of Bosniak politicians towards the OHR/EUSR and international organisations, while understandable, serves to heighten Serb distrust of both the Bosniak representatives and the international community and, it would seem, contributes little to encouraging cooperation and reconciliation across ethno-national lines. According to Radomir Trivić of the RS-based DNS party, “the decision to leave the OHR here is a product of the dependence of Sarajevo parties on the OHR... politicians like Silajdžić are not ready to talk to us, and that’s why they need the OHR here”.<sup>41</sup> Borenović is in agreement, noting that “some political parties always view the OHR as some sort of judge who will say ‘you are right, they are not’ or ‘this is the decision’ and we have to adopt it”. Čavić adds that local representatives use their close relationship with the OHR/EUSR to attack their political opponents, stating that “the key thing is,

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<sup>36</sup> See Note 23.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Republika Srpska PM Sparks Regional Furore’, *Bosnia Daily*, 3 June 2008, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Interview conducted with author in Banski Dvor, Banja Luka, 22 February 2007.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, ‘Early Warning System, First Quarterly Report – March 2008’, UNDP, Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Interview conducted with author in Banja Luka, 6 February 2007.

political structures must keep close to the OHR, or they have to keep close with the strong administrations that have influence in this country. If you are close to them you will have less problems, or you won't have any problems, but you will have a chance to make problems for your political competitors".<sup>42</sup> For their part, Serb representatives have voiced their opinion that a reduction in the powers of the international community would lead to a strengthening of the domestic institutions and facilitate cross ethno-national cooperation. Radojičić insists that the domestic representatives would have no choice but to behave responsibly in the absence of the OHR, and would rise to meet the challenge, noting "they would have to do it, like every other country. In any other country there are problems, there are reforms, but they have to do this. If they are failing, well, then somebody else will come in who will do this, now, or in the next two or five years, so it is necessary to be so in BiH, as in any other country, or else it will be a permanent object of the international community's presence".<sup>43</sup> The aforementioned Trivić concludes that a closure of the OHR would encourage agreement between Bosniak representatives and those from the RS, arguing that Bosniak politicians would have no default international community/OHR position to fall back or rely upon. According to Trivić, "if the OHR did leave, we feel that the politicians in the Federation, in Sarajevo, would have to compromise because there is nobody else, we must make compromise".<sup>44</sup> These views may well be held with all sincerity, however, they also of course sit well with the Serb representatives' desire to see the international community in BiH shorn of its powers.

While BiH politicians go on with using the uncertainty surrounding the future character and role of the OHR/EUSR and other international organisations in the country to score political points against their opponents, the post-Dayton political dispensation overseen by the international community continues to disappoint and dishearten the vast majority of citizens. In July 2008, the Sarajevo-based Centre for Investigative Journalism reported that 65 per cent of BiH citizens thought that political corruption was increasing, with 54 per cent of the opinion that the Federation (FBiH entity) authorities were corrupt and 48 per cent thinking the same of RS officials. More than 33 per cent of BiH citizens also considered the international organisations, including OHR/EUSR and EUPM, corrupt.<sup>45</sup> The air of frustration and pessimism induced by the current political accommodation drove the Oscar-winning director, Danis Tanović to found a new political party, *Nasa Stranka* (Our Party), in April 2008, promising to represent the interests of ordinary BiH citizens from across the ethno-national divides and break the stranglehold of the discredited, in many people's eyes, nationalist parties. Despite initially attracting a large amount of

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<sup>42</sup> See Note 32.

<sup>43</sup> See Note 23.

<sup>44</sup> See Note 41.

<sup>45</sup> 'Every second citizen in BiH thinks that the ruling authorities are corrupted', *Vecernji List*, 7 July 2008, p. 5.

media coverage, Tanović's party has failed to attract in any significant number those dissatisfied with the political situation in the country, winning only one mayoral position at the October 2008 local elections. Disillusionment and disappointment with official politics is apparently increasing as participation levels continue to decrease, with, for example, the presidential elections in the RS of December 2007 attracting a turnout of just under 37 per cent. According to Aleksandar Živanović of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly in Banja Luka, "it is very hard to convince people to vote... the problem with public participation has several dimensions, one of which is the public perception of politics which is not very good... We can say that the majority of people say politics is a filthy word, related to corruption, that politicians are not interested in the well-being of the whole population".<sup>46</sup> Almost every day the BiH press carry commentaries and editorials bemoaning the corruption, irresponsibility, ineptness and more of politicians and wondering how they can possibly justify their lofty salaries in a country with such high levels of poverty. As one of these commentaries noted, "if all the pre-electoral promises given so far were fulfilled, Switzerland and Norway would be undeveloped compared to us. If we put together all the tents from all electoral campaigns, it would be the biggest circus ever".<sup>47</sup> All this disillusionment and cynicism is in spite of the OSCE head of mission in BiH, the American diplomat Douglas Davison, claiming that "the ultimate goal of our efforts in this country is... the creation of a society in which the citizens of the country are willing and indeed encouraged to participate in the political life of the country".<sup>48</sup>

Regardless of the façade of progress which accompanies each successfully attained EU accession benchmark, citizens remain pessimistic regarding the state of official politics. A lack of true accountability in the BiH political elite and the international community serves to increase political cynicism which, in turn, facilitates continuing political irresponsibility. As Demir Mahmutčehajić, an activist with the pressure group *DOSTA!* which seeks political reform, notes, "there is a view that politicians are all the same, and basically that is true – they are all the same. It is very difficult to judge our politicians on the level of their performance, because nobody is asking for responsibility from the politicians".<sup>49</sup> For their part, some politicians recognise the low regard in which they are held by the public, with the aforementioned Borenović observing that the public's attitude towards his profession "is very negative, very negative, and that is probably something that will be very hard to change".<sup>50</sup> Trivić concurs, stating "the problem is that nobody trusts the politicians here, it is the same in the whole world but I think it is much stronger here, they always lied to people and it is

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<sup>46</sup> Interview conducted by author, Banja Luka, 5 April 2006.

<sup>47</sup> 'Forcing Salzburg', Svetlana Cenec, *Bosnia Daily*, 27 May 2008, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> 'The Role of the OSCE in state-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina'. Speech by Ambassador Douglas Davidson, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the Peace Support Operations Centre, Sarajevo, 15 May 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Interview conducted by author, Sarajevo, 3 March 2007.

<sup>50</sup> See Note 26.

very hard now to interest them to vote... Politicians are not standing very good in people's eyes because they don't trust them, there is certain animosity".<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

The argument from Serb RS political representatives given here is that the presence and influence of the international community, and in particular the OHR/EUSR, is indirectly responsible, to a large extent, for the ills which see official politics held in such contempt by the public. The continuing international authority encourages politicians to behave irresponsibly, disregarding the needs of citizens which consequently leads to public disillusionment with politics. Serb officials from the RS have, by and large, been subjected the most to the removal powers of OHR, and with continuing calls from certain quarters for the removal of the RS Prime Minister, Milorad Dodik, for example, they would be more than content to see the international presence in BiH trimmed of its strong powers. Serb representatives continue to call directly for the closure of the OHR, and have received the backing of Russian diplomats, with the Russian Ambassador in Sarajevo, for example, noting that certain countries' "expectation of an ideal situation in BiH means that the closure of the OHR can be endlessly postponed".<sup>52</sup> At the UN's Security Council meeting on BiH in May 2008, the Russian representative, Vitaly Churkin, stated that "the major imperative must remain a policy to transfer authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina from international structures to legally elected national authorities".<sup>53</sup> The Serb member of the tripartite BiH Presidency has also reiterated the view that the OHR should close and observed that "the international community should finally start helping this country, instead of managing it and ordering it what to do".<sup>54</sup> Bosniak calls for the OHR/EUSR to stay and maintain its authorities feeds the view that they, of the three main ethno-national groups, are particularly dependent on the international presence, a dependence which encourages irresponsibility and unresponsiveness. These views, of course, suit a certain Serb political agenda – free from the constraints applied by the international community the RS could more easily ignore Bosniak calls for strengthening the central BiH state and pursue a path of self-determination. There is also an argument that BiH politicians continue to behave 'irresponsibly' as they have no desire for the international community to leave the country and actually face the challenges of running the country effectively. However, this does not necessarily invalidate the contention of political representatives and others over the insidious effects that continue as a result of BiH actors' inability to exercise real responsibility.

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<sup>51</sup> See Note 41.

<sup>52</sup> 'PIC Standpoints are Unacceptable', *Nezavisne Novine*, 28 June 2008, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> 'International Community still has work to do in Bosnia and Herzegovina despite recent progress, High Representative Says in Briefing to Security Council', 5894th Meeting of the Security Council 19 May 2008, Department of Public Information, UN, New York.

<sup>54</sup> 'PIC Acted Irresponsibly', *Glas Srpske*, 26 June 2008, p. 2.

In the last number of years the international community has frequently commented on its intention to entrust BiH political institutions with 'full ownership'. While the OHR/EUSR has taken limited recent action to remove elected officials or impose legislation under its Bonn Powers, the international presence – whether it be through the vetting of legislation by the OHR/EUSR, Council of Europe or OSCE, the OHR/EUSR 'threatening' to remove representatives (if not actually doing so) or the recurrent commentaries in the media from the ambassadors of the USA, UK and Germany in particular on what course the political agenda should take – continues to exert a strong influence. The 'conditions', 'objectives' and 'benchmarks' which the domestic institutions have to meet as a quid pro quo for future 'ownership' are derived from the policy goals of the international community. A transition from the Dayton to Brussels 'phase', from the OHR to EUSR and EU accession process, merely represents a continuation of the practice whereby BiH political policies are decided outside the country and the domestic political institutions. While this remains the case, domestic representatives have little reason to direct their attention towards addressing the immediate needs of citizens. The EU accession process should bring tangible benefits to BiH, however, it will be a number of years before the BiH public actually experience these benefits, while some in BiH, such as small farmers, who are admittedly in a dire situation at present, may well in fact lose out further through the structural reforms required. With BiH political institutions focused on the EU accession process and related issues, such as constitutional reform, pushed by the representatives of the international community, levels of accountability and responsibility to those whom they derive a mandate from are unlikely to increase, doing little to reconnect the BiH public with official politics and the related institutions.

No one, of course, will argue that the political representatives of BiH are paragons of integrity and efficiency, thwarted in their virtuous attempt at improving the lives of citizens by the power of the international community. However, through continuing to drive the political agenda and maintaining its substantial influence, the international community offers the domestic representatives a way out of political responsibility, an excuse for doing and achieving little. If the PIC Steering Board and other international players were to genuinely hand over 'ownership', the much-maligned domestic representatives would have their bluff called somewhat, either finally addressing some of the issues facing citizens or expose themselves and risk being removed from office by the electorate. An absence of international pressure to amend BiH's complex constitution may well facilitate a decrease in nationalist rhetoric and allow domestic representatives the chance to forge their own agreement in their own time on this sensitive issue. It may also open up the space necessary for domestic representatives to reach a consensus on increasing the efficiency and functionality of political institutions at all levels in the country. The notion of politicians from across the ethno-national divide agreeing on significant changes to the constitutional set-up is not that far-fetched. In April 2006, for

example, an internationally backed package of constitutional reforms received the support of major parties from the three main ethno-national blocs, narrowly falling short of obtaining the two-thirds majority in the BiH parliament necessary for the reform bill to pass. The possibility of the RS seceding, apparently the most obvious challenge to the present territorial integrity of BiH, is unlikely to come to fruition in the short to medium term. RS representatives have consistently stated their desire for the entity's status to be maintained under the conditions laid down by Dayton, while the presence of over two thousand EUFOR troops and the sheer level of distaste amongst the BiH public for a new conflict make any major changes to the present BiH set-up without the agreement of the three main ethno-national groups improbable should the OHR/EUSR be stripped of its executive authorities. Furthermore, the RS leadership has not sought to make much capital out of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence or the developments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in a push for the entity's self-determination.

Domestic responsibility, as noted by Killick (2005), is desirable as it is likely to increase the chances that decision making will take account of local political realities. Killick also argues that decision making and policy implementation are more likely to be viewed as legitimate by the public when they are performed by domestic actors, rather than through the force of outside actors. Commenting on post-conflict, state-building scenarios, Diamond argues that "ambitious international intervention cannot succeed, and the institutions it establishes cannot be viable, unless there is some sense of participation and ownership on the part of the people in the state being reconstructed" (2006:112). Additionally, Fukuyama contends that "early local ownership increases the likelihood of creating sustainable local institutions that have some chance of eventually surviving an exit by the outside powers" (2005:87).

Therefore, when the international community speaks of entrusting BiH citizens and their political representatives with ownership over the country's direction, the 'handover' should be genuine, with a real transfer of responsibility and not simply a cosmetic alteration, for example, from an OHR to an EUSR still endowed with the same powers. To invigorate the health of BiH politics, a break from the now injurious interdependent relationship between some international organisations and the domestic political elite may be necessary. The majority of representatives on the Peace Implementation Council may well feel that the international influence in BiH can only be reduced when local authorities are in a position to act in the interests of all BiH citizens and the political institutions are streamlined and more robust. However, according to members of the domestic political elite itself, the international presence keeps local authorities weak. Therefore, it may be the case that the international community needs to make the first move to break the deadlock. As the aforementioned Mahmutćehajić stated, "the involvement of the OHR, OSCE and other international institutions, is harmful at the moment. It would be better



for them to leave as soon as possible, even if that probably means even more chaos than now. But that chaos, in my opinion, would hurt the politicians and not the ordinary people. The ordinary people are already in such deep shit to be honest, it would not affect them a lot, but the politicians would be forced to sort of try and make an agreement. There would be no excuses any more, there would be no Big Brother expected to watch over us".<sup>55</sup> BiH may not look any different when bequeathed with full ownership and domestic responsibility. Cynicism and apathy concerning official politics, after all, is widespread in contemporary society. Nevertheless, at least such a scenario affords the possibility that political institutions could become rehabilitated, for domestic leaders to be responsible to, and held accountable before, their own people, rather than before international authorities and their norms. However one measures the "success" of the West's intervention in BiH, it surely must include entrusting BiH citizens and their political representatives with the authority to direct their own future.

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<sup>55</sup> See Note 49.