

The Demise of the Dayton Protectorate

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The Bosnian war ended with signature of the Dayton Peace Accords in December 1995. Since December 1997, the country has been run as an international protectorate. A succession of international governors, called the 'High Representatives', have been appointed by a consortium of foreign powers. The High Representatives have had unlimited legal authority to overrule domestic institutions, unilaterally impose legislation without the consent of Bosnia's various democratically elected parliaments, and dismiss public officials whom they deem insufficiently cooperative with their efforts to reform the country and its economy. This extraordinary state of affairs is about to end, as the current High Representative has recently engaged in a negligent feat of self-diminution of his own powers. The international community's powers of dictatorship were the only glue sticking together an otherwise unsustainable state that the Dayton Peace Accords never intended to create. This raises a fundamental challenge for the international community: how to engage with Bosnia in the period after the international proconsulship has come to an end, to ensure that it does not again become a locus of political instability and civil conflict.

Bosnia's war was fought between the country's three ethnic groups, the Muslims ('Bosniacs'), Croats, and Serbs. The Bosniacs and the Croats formed an uneasy truce in March 1994 under U.S. mediation, dividing their joint territory into a series of Swiss-style cantons called 'the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina'. It was assumed that the Serbs would eventually sign onto the same arrangement. But in the Dayton negotiations they refused. Instead they insisted on their own statelet, called 'Republika Srpska' (RS), which had equal status with the Federation. Under the new Bosnian constitution agreed in the Dayton Peace Accords, the Federation and the RS became two equivalent 'entities', strong sub-sovereign federal units existing under a weak central government. But the constitutional arrangement was lop-sided, because the cantons, again with highly decentralized power compared to the Federation, continued to exist within the Federation entity whereas the RS was unitary.

This mind-bogglingly complex arrangement was dysfunctional from the start. The central state had only eight narrowly defined spheres of competence under the Dayton constitution, and complex power-sharing mechanisms to ensure that even within those spheres no one ethnic group could be outvoted by the others. Bosniacs, the majority ethnic group, were the most dissatisfied with this arrangement. They pursued a political agenda for increasing central government, because they saw themselves as dominating a unitary state. The Croats, at least initially, mostly ignored the entire constitutional structure. They promptly established parallel political institutions that were integrated into neighboring Croatia. And the Serbs, who had been fighting for their own independent Bosnian Serb state, did everything they could to frustrate formation of the Bosnian central government. Nobody was happy with the Dayton Peace Agreement. It stopped the fighting, but it did not stop the struggle. The three groups, having exhausted their ammunition and finances, and having been ground to a halt under the weight of a hundred thousand dead, would now turn to the arena of international politics as their new battleground.

In the mean time, the international community laboured under the collective fiction that the Dayton constitutional arrangement was somehow workable and Bosnia could persist as a functional state. Demonstrating success was particularly important for the Clinton administration, which had taken significant political risk in mediating the peace agreement (at the time seen as an impossible mission in the face of the warring parties' intransigence) and had committed thousands of U.S. troops to the subsequent peacekeeping effort. Unfortunately the recalcitrant Bosnian politicians would not play along with the progressive picture the U.S. administration wanted to present to its domestic audiences. Serbs and, to a lesser degree Croats, refused to participate in state level institutions and made every effort to resist reintegration, blocking international community efforts to secure refugee returns, promoting ethnic hatred propaganda through the media and threatening resumption of hostilities. Something had to be done or the peace would not be sustainable. The solution was to turn Bosnia into an international protectorate.

The way this was done was intriguing. The Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) were drafted by American lawyers. It was never their intention to create an international dictator who would direct the country's political affairs. But that was how the DPA came to be subsequently interpreted. Annex 10 to the DPA provides that the warring parties 'request the designation of a High Representative' to 'monitor' the peace

settlement, 'promote cooperation', 'coordinate the activities of... civilian organizations', and 'facilitate... the resolution of any difficulties'. The High Representative would thus be a manager of the international community's post-conflict peace building efforts, and a mediator between the domestic parties. For the first two years of his mandate, this was precisely what the High Representative did. He was not a dictator, and he had no powers of imposition. But throughout this period there was a growing sense of frustration amongst both Americans and Europeans that the Bosnian post-war political system was not working. The warring factions refused to cooperate, there was no functional central government, and the military commitment of peacekeeping troops – which President Clinton had initially promised would last no longer than twelve months – was starting to look like a very long-term project. To inject a sense of progress into the Bosnian peace-building mission, the international community turned the High Representative into an international legal authoritarian.

The first signs of this sea change were in the middle of 1997. The new High Representative Carlos Westendorp, who had replaced the first High Representative Carl Bildt in June of that year, had more support from the U.S. State Department than his predecessor, and he decided to take a more forceful role. In August 1997 he ordered Serb and Croat radio and television stations to moderate their political propaganda, which on occasion had become extreme. To enforce these dictates U.S. military radio transmission-jamming equipment was used to block Serb television broadcasts and IFOR troops occupied Serb transmission stations; in conjunction, the High Representative demanded that the entire board of a Serb radio and television station resign. None of this was done by formal legal instrument; it was simply a matter of the U.S. military acting at the High Representative's informal request.

This surprising new *de facto* authority was thereafter sanctioned by a quasi-legal instrument. The progress of the international community in post-war Bosnia has always been overseen by a group of civil servants from interested countries' foreign ministries called the 'Peace Implementation Council' (PIC). In December 1997, the PIC met in Bonn, Germany, and decided to 'interpret' Annex 10. It issued a statement saying that it:

...welcomes the High Representative's intention... to mak[e] binding decisions... on... interim measures... when the parties are unable to reach

agreement... [and] other measures to ensure implementation of the Peace Agreement... Such measures may include actions against persons holding public office ... who are found by the High Representative to be in violation of legal commitments made under the Peace Agreement.

Suddenly the High Representative found himself moving from being a 'facilitator' and a mediator to being able to issue 'binding decisions', known as the 'Bonn powers'. This in itself was surprising enough, as such a declaration ran quite contrary to the spirit and text of Annex 10 to the DPA, and was legally quite indefensible. But even more astonishing was the manner in which the then High Representative, Carlos Westendorp, promptly used his newfound legal powers. On 16 December 1997, barely a week after the PIC's declaration, he 'imposed' a new 'Law on Citizenship of BiH', drafted by his office. It had been presented to the State Parliament but they had failed to adopt it, so the High Representative unilaterally signed it into law.

The myriad ways in which the High Representative used his new powers mushroomed thereafter. The first dismissal was a Decision removing Pero Raguz from his position as Mayor of Stolac (a town in the south of the country) dated 4 March 1998, which in fact was just a half-page letter to Mr. Raguz. The letter contained no detailed explanation of why Mr. Raguz was being removed and gave him no opportunity to make representations about whether his removal was justified or proportionate. Mr. Raguz had been democratically elected. The trigger event for his removal was the murder of an elderly Serb refugee couple who had returned to Stolac. There was no public evidence of Mr. Raguz's complicity in the murder; he was condemned for failing to make Stolac sufficiently safe. His removal was merely a political scalp. This course became quite commonplace. The same provisions of the Bonn declaration were also construed as a right to make miscellaneous orders directing public officials to do all manner of things, where no legal ground for what they were being ordered to do otherwise existed. The first of these was the Decision establishing an interim arrangement to run the Mostar airport dated 1 March 1998; soon thereafter came the Decision imposing the design of bank notes dated 27 March 1998. With the presence of almost tens of thousands of foreign peacekeeping troops in the country, in practice if not in theory loyal to the High Representative, his orders enforced themselves. Nobody came to challenge the High Representative about anything. Given the breadth and frequency of exercise of these powers, it soon

became appropriate to describe postwar Bosnia as an international protectorate. The High Representative came to flex his muscles at the highest levels of government, dismissing even the President of Republika Srpska on March 5, 1999. Given these broad and unrestrained powers, and the opaque fashion in which they were exercised, the Office of the High Representative came to acquire the most formidable lobbying powers with domestic politicians.

Decisions of the High Representative became a growth industry. Between 1998 and 2005 inclusive, successive High Representatives issued 757 decisions, removing 119 people from public office and imposing 286 laws or amendments to laws. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) became a major bureaucracy, employing hundreds of people in the exercise of drafting, consulting, debating and enacting these decisions. Passing reference should also be made to the gross lack of due process in the exercise of these powers. The right to amend legislation, and to dismiss public officials, could be exercised without any prior reference to any affected party. Bosnia's democratically elected parliaments did not have to be consulted. Where officials were removed, they did not have to be given any notice, or an opportunity to respond to the evidence against them. Indeed the evidence did not need even have to exist. There was no possibility of appeal or review of a decision, even if one lost one's job or was otherwise suffered direct and individual harm as a result. The scope of these decisions gradually and inexorably expanded. Decisions imposed legislation in every conceivable area, appointed domestic and international officials, established international commissions, blocked bank accounts of people thought to be assisting the flight of war criminals, amended and annulled decisions of executive bodies and ordered changes of policy in executive institutions, subjected political parties to fines, instructed public officials how to apply legislation, and more.

On one hot summer's day, 30 June 2004, High Representative Lord Paddy Ashdown (United Kingdom) removed fifty-eight people from public office, all Serbs. On the last two working days he was in office, May 22 and 23, 2002, Ashdown's predecessor Wolfgang Petritsch (Austria) issued 44 decisions, removing twelve people, imposing twenty-four laws and amending the constitutions of both Entities, in a tradition of what had become known as 'airport decisions' (being presumed to be signed at the airport, as the High Representative leaves). One has to wonder whether, in these and countless other cases where dismissals occurred *en masse*, adequate consideration was given to the individual circumstances of each individual

dismissed. The reasons given in the text of decisions were usually quite inadequate. Generally there was reference to a policy failure by a domestic institution, together with a broad assertion that the person removed had to be held responsible for that failure, but without citing specific behaviour by the individual that constituted clear wrongdoing. The paucity of reasoning contained in removal decisions was hardly surprising: OHR had no investigators who could conduct any kind of detailed investigation into an official's wrongdoing. Its approach was inevitably broad brush and frequently quite unfair to the individuals involved. Sometimes the 'real' reason for a dismissal, discussed in the hallways of OHR but never made clear to the victim of the removal, was a piece of supposed military intelligence that condemned the person. But the quality of international military intelligence in post-war Bosnia was poor. Bored peacekeeping soldiers, without significant intelligence training, were instructed to collect intelligence in coffee bars; the reports they prepared were placed on files without a serious filtering process and were subsequently cited as gospel.

This model continued until late 2005. At that time, two things happened. First, the foreign powers that had contributed peacekeeping troops came to significantly draw down their forces. The last U.S. troops left Bosnia in March 2004. By January 2007 there were only 2,500 foreign troops left in a country of four million people, very few of which were combat ready. Second, the cavalier manner in which High Representative dismissals were signed, without due process or presentation of evidence, became the subject of increasing international academic and legal criticism. Private think tanks, academic writers, and even the Council of Europe (the EU's human rights body) came to study and condemn the use by the High Representative of his 'Bonn powers'. In March 2007, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina held that removals of public officials by the High Representative violated the European Convention on Human Rights. OHR was so incensed that the then High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling (Germany), signed a decision annulling the effect of the Constitutional Court's decision.

By this time, however, the tide had irreversibly changed. The most activist High Representative, Paddy Ashdown (May 2002 – January 2006), had a clear agenda to build Bosnia's central government and undermine the country's sub-sovereign political units: only in this way, he reasoned, could Bosnia become a normal European state and put its violent war behind it. To this end, he became a

one-man legislative machine, repeatedly using the Bonn powers to enact legislation creating new institutions, and implicit threats to remove officials to push the Entities to agree to transfer new powers to central government. His approach was simple: place both the monopoly on force and control of taxation in the hands of central government, and the Entities would wither away, ever more irrelevant. Hence the reforms on which he focused were the judiciary, the army, taxation and the police. Under his reign a raft of new central government institutions were set up to replace Entity control in these areas. Yet he eventually ran out of steam after more than three and a half years, by which time the attitude towards Bosnia within the international community had changed radically. The memories of television footage showing refugees and massacres had faded, and the outside world had forgotten about Bosnia. The new philosophy espoused was 'international disengagement', and Ashdown was replaced in February 2006 by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, who espoused a philosophy of domestic political ownership and explicitly disavowed use of the Bonn powers. By July 2006 he had announced that the Office of the High Representative would be closing in June 2007. But dark political storms were brewing. The new state institutions that Ashdown had created had not been organically grown and could not survive without intensive international oversight. State institutions occupied shiny new buildings in Sarajevo, but the civil servants who populated them could not cooperate on the most basic of things because the political agendas of their party leaders were so radically different. Without the threat of arbitrary removals, there was no incentive for them to stay in line. Senior judicial and taxation authorities heavily relied on international officials appointed by the High Representative. Nationalist rhetoric became ever more vocal in advance of the October 2006 countrywide elections, which saw leaders elected on uncompromising ethnic platforms.

The international community, previously comforted by the Ashdown vision of a progressively centralizing Bosnian unitary state, suddenly began to feel distinctly uneasy about the direction in which the country was heading. Without the Bonn powers, it seemed as though all the progress that country had apparently achieved would unravel. A volte-face was required, and a political scapegoat was needed. In February 2007 Schwarz-Schilling was told he was fired with effect from June, and in the same month the PIC made a decision to extend OHR's mandate by one more year, to June 2008. But by now the job of High Representative had become a

poisoned chalice. The country was heading in an unsettling direction, there were few foreign troops left, the Bonn powers had fallen into disuse, and most seasoned Balkan experts had moved on from the country. The international community was having serious trouble finding a replacement High Representative. Eventually it settled on the youthful Miroslav Lajcak, a Slovak diplomat who, at 43, was the youngest person ever to hold the job. The State Department had its hands full in the Middle East, and no longer wished to commit senior personnel to the Balkans. It had given the job of Lajcak's 'principal deputy' to an equally youthful civil servant Raffi Gregorian, with a message that the Europeans should take over in Bosnia. The EU agenda for Bosnia was to place it on the same track for EU membership as the other transition economies in the Balkans and elsewhere in the European Union. Under this model, an agenda for institutional and economic reform is agreed, set out in a "stabilization and association agreement" (SAA). The candidate country is then at liberty to pursue this agenda at whatever speed it wishes: EU bureaucrats will periodically conduct assessments to see how things are going. Once all the conditions for membership set out in the SAA are fulfilled, the country will be admitted to the European Union. In the mean time, a variety of grants to promote institutional reform and infrastructure improvements are made available. The entire process is voluntary: the candidate country can halt or reverse its reforms at any time. But, so the theory goes, the carrot of EU membership is sufficient to set even the most troublesome East European countries on a sure course for reform.

This model has been very successful elsewhere, with countries such as Romania and Bulgaria managing to satisfy the EU's fairly exacting standards within a moderately short period of time. But Bosnia, with its long history of foreign domination, inter-ethnic violence, shifting borders and a recent bloody civil war, was no ordinary country. Moreover, the process of moving Bosnia towards EU accession had been complicated because the SAA process had been co-opted by Ashdown in the course of pursuing his state building agenda. The most intractable of all Ashdown's projects had been reform of Bosnia's police. Policing was a function reserved to the Entities and the cantons under the Dayton constitution. Ashdown had wanted it to become a state function, because then secession of Republika Srpska, so often feared, would be permanently foreclosed. Much of the Bosnian Serb military capability during the war had come from special police units, who had a reputation for committing war crimes. If the RS police could be brought under state control, the

Bosnian Serb military potential would be permanently neutered and the RS would never again be able to take up arms to detach itself from the rest of the country. But for precisely this reason, police reform was the issue on which the Bosnian Serbs dug their heels in the most. In an attempt to exert pressure upon them to agree to the reforms he had in mind, Ashdown worked through the European Commission. He persuaded the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Oli Rehn, that centralizing reform of Bosnia's police should be stated as a precondition for Bosnia's signature of an SAA. And so, while Bosnia's SAA was negotiated by the end of 2006, it was never signed because no deal on police reform could be achieved. Moreover, this strategy had backfired seriously on OHR: because police reform had now become a component of EU conditionality, and the EU insisted that steps towards EU membership are undertaken voluntarily, they would not allow police reform to be imposed by the High Representative.

An impasse had been reached. By the time Lajcak commenced his duties in July 2007, Bosnia's politics had become a single-issue program in the eyes of the international community. The carrot of EU membership was foreclosed until an agreement on police reform was reached. But no such agreement could be reached, for the RS would never give up budgetary or management control of the police in its territory. Such a move threatened the very core of the RS's autonomous status within Bosnia and Herzegovina. OHR's senior officials attempted heavy-handed pressure tactics, appearing in print journals and on television threatening sanctions as broad as travel bans for Bosnian politicians, introducing a visa requirement for Bosnian citizens to travel to Croatia (with which over 60% of Bosnia's border adjoins), recommencing negotiations for the SAA already agreed, and firing of the country's top Bosniac and Serb politicians. All this pressure was ultimately to no avail; the country was simply not ready for a reform of this magnitude. Moreover, in the European context insisting on police reform was incomprehensible. Very few modern western democracies have police forces that are fully centrally controlled. Policing is by its nature a local function; the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands all have significant locally managed and funded police forces. In the Bosnian context, centralised management of police is all the more incomprehensible because the country has no common codes of criminal law or criminal procedure. A state police service would be enforcing different laws and applying different procedures to their investigations depending on which sub-

sovereign unit's territory they would be operating in. In post-war Bosnia, all political and legal logic militates against police reform of the kind OHR has been pushing.

OHR had set a deadline of the end of September 2007 to reach an agreement on police reform, before "consequences" would follow. When the deadline came and went, OHR felt the need to do something. It was starting to feel distinctly impotent; the new High Representative was supposed to overcome the *laissez-faire* approach of his predecessor, but he had failed in the very first project on which he had embarked. And so OHR decided to pursue a reassertion of the Bonn powers. They had not been used to any significant effect since Ashdown's departure in January 2006. Now, the reasoning went, it was time to start exercising them again. The consequences were calamitous and have led to the worst crisis in Bosnian politics since the end of the war in December 1995. For everything had changed since Ashdown's departure. The level of foreign troops present in Bosnia was by now negligible. The impending crisis of Kosovo's self-declaration of independence had sent the Serbian government's blood boiling in Belgrade, and it was determined to link Kosovo and the RS by way of an implied threat that RS secession would follow any declaration of independence by Kosovo. In this it was supported by Russia, both because Russia fears similar secessionist movements in its southern Caucasian republics and is determined that a precedent not be set, and because it sees Serbia and Bosnia as its European footholds in its re-emergence as a major power on the world stage. Russian businesses, many of them state owned, have been investing heavily in both Serbia and Republika Srpska in the last couple of years. Russia had voted against the extension of OHR's mandate at the PIC in February 2007, and was now threatening to use its UN Security Council veto against the extension of the miniscule peacekeeping force still in Bosnia beyond the end of 2007 (a threat on which it subsequently relented).

When the High Representative decided to impose the 'consequences' he had threatened, and signed a decision on 19 October 2007 changing the way the state's executive and legislative organs functioned, the Bosnian Serbs pounced. In theory, the reforms he imposed were innocuous enough: they merely diluted (but did not abolish completely) the ethnic quota vetoes existing in the state's Council of Ministers and bicameral Parliament. (Outlining the minimum support, from representatives of all three ethnic groups, necessary for a decision to be passed in either body). But it mattered little. The subject matter of the decision allowed the

Bosnian Serbs to argue that their role in state institutions was being undermined, for it was mostly the Serbs who could be expected to exercise their veto against central government measures. It did not help that OHR engaged in no consultation whatsoever with domestic politicians before the decision was issued, or that there was a compelling argument that the measures enacted were inconsistent with the Bosnian constitution. The RS Prime Minister, Milorad Dodik, went straight to Belgrade to consult with his Serbian counterpart and the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister. When he returned to the Bosnian Serb capital Banja Luka, it was clear that a common position had been formed. The October 19 decision was an illegal and unconstitutional use of the Bonn powers, and it would not be respected. The High Representative must revoke his own decision or all Bosnian Serbs would boycott state institutions. To reinforce his message, Dodik put tens of thousands of demonstrators on the streets throughout the RS just a few days later. Then the Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency handed in his 'sealed' resignation to the RS National Assembly, to be accepted whenever Dodik so chose, effectively withdrawing himself from all further political activity. And finally the Bosnian Serb state prime minister, Nikola Spiric, resigned. No replacement can be appointed without the concurrence of Dodik's political party. The Serbian prime minister insisted Lajcak resign and the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the High Representative's measures. Thus the crisis creation project was complete. It continues to simmer as of the beginning of December 2007.

This stand-off seems likely to continue for some time, during which Bosnia's state institutions will be paralyzed indefinitely. But one thing does seem reasonably certain. Whatever the outcome, OHR cannot win. If Lajcak and Gregorian back down, they lose all credibility and the Bonn powers are finished in practice. If they do not back down, the Bosnian central government collapses and Dodik will gradually dismantle each and every state institution, paving the way for gradual detachment of the RS from the rest of the Bosnian state. This will precipitate the gravest crisis, for the Bosnian Croats will likely follow suit. The Bosniacs have recently been quietly rearming, ready to fight to prevent secession of Croat and Serb statelets and dismemberment of the country which they feel is rightly theirs. If OHR attempts to dismiss Dodik, the sense of crisis will be only exacerbated. Without troops, OHR has no practical means of enforcing such an order; Dodik won a landslide in the RS elections in October 2006, and controls virtually all RS institutions that will prove

loyal to him rather than OHR. Dodik has threatened to have 50,000 civilians march on Sarajevo in the event of an attempt to dismiss him, a threat which if carried through would precipitate severe civil conflict.

The net result is that there will be no more exercise of the 'Bonn powers'. By issuing this carelessly thought through, poorly timed decision, OHR has summarily decapitated itself. OHR officials now talk of a grave crisis in Bosnia, but they neglect to mention that they are significant causes of it. They have overplayed a hand in which they no longer have any cards, and now the poverty of their gambit is exposed. Lajcak is already discussing the need for extension of OHR's mandate beyond June 2008. But this demonstrates the deepest naivety. OHR is in this mess because it no longer has significant authority with any of Bosnia's domestic actors. Legal orders are not self-enforcing. There must be political will, threats of force, or offers of money, that induce politicians to respect a legal regime such as OHR. These are no longer present. The troops have gone, and so has much of the international development funding. The Bosniacs traditionally supported OHR because they perceived the organization as supporting their goals. But in its reluctance to impose police reform, OHR showed itself incapable of delivering on the Bosniac political agenda. OHR has dropped the ball. It assumes itself still politically significant but it has now been eclipsed by far broader geo-political strategic interests. Bosnia has become a proxy battleground in a conflict of which the west is only faintly aware: that between Russia and the Islamic world. Bosnia is in danger of becoming another Chechnya. The Russians are spending money in the RS, and Iran and Saudi Arabia are spending money in Bosniac parts of the country. Sarajevo is now replete with Saudi-funded mosques and boasts an Iranian government cultural centre. The U.S. and the EU have a common interest in keeping Bosnia stable and western-looking, but they are no longer devoting the resources necessary to maintain serious political influence in the country. They rely upon the figleaf of OHR's authority, which has now dwindled to miniscule proportions because there are neither western troops nor western money in the country to any significant degree. As the west turns its back on Bosnia, altogether more insidious forces vie for influence.

The Office of the High Representative is now a dead letter, and the west must abandon the illusion that it can retain influence in the country through its mandate. Consequently, OHR should be closed as soon as possible. The EU should properly reengage with Bosnia, and the Americans should encourage this to occur. The EU

realises that twelve years after the end of the war, colonial dictatorship is no longer an appropriate mode of engagement. The alternative is to genuinely pursue the carrot of EU membership. A unitary police force is a formidable goal even in the most developed European democracies and should not be pushed upon Bosnia. It should certainly not be used to hold up the only foreign policy tool that the west can bring to bear upon Bosnia – the prospect of EU accession. Instead America and the EU should take Bosnia as it finds it. This is not a country yet ready for strong central government. Just as the United States found in its early years, a strong central state is something for which there must be rational economic and political consensus amongst the disparate peoples of a regionalized country. They are not yet all persuaded of that logic, and absent significant military reengagement (now unrealistic), we do not have the resources to force it upon them. Instead engage with Bosnia's politicians to the extent realistic. Spend money in Bosnia, just as are the Russians and the Saudis. Allocate aid budgets. Sign the SAA. Spend money on infrastructure. Educate on institutional reform. Bosnia is one of the poorest, institutionally impoverished and most corrupt countries in Europe. It needs, but it is not receiving, massive influxes of development assistance. That assistance should be provided free of political strings. The role of the west must be seen as neutral, rather than favouring one side or another. For that reason as well the Office of the High Representative must close. But by spending money, and promoting institutional reform, and gently guiding the country towards the EU, the west can pursue its foreign policy goals of keeping Bosnia a single state, decoupling its development from the fate of Kosovo, and maintaining a relative degree of political stability. Unification of Bosnia into a reasonably centralised state will come in time, because the geographic logic of Bosnia's unification is compelling: the shape of the RS precludes it from being a credible contiguous independent territory. But the realisation by Bosnia's Serbs of the need to cooperate with their Muslim counterparts, and the realisation by Bosnia's Muslims of the painful concessions they will need to grant the Serbs to secure that cooperation, will take a great deal of time. Indeed, a generation may be required. In the mean time, the west needs to make progress where it can, and without loading the political dice in favour of one of the country's three groups over the others. The way to do this is to spend money rather than to rely upon the straw man of the international colonial governor. It is time for the Office of the High Representative to finally close its doors.