



**The Legacy of Christian Schmidt:  
The Limits of International Authority  
in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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## THE LEGACY OF CHRISTIAN SCHMIDT: THE LIMITS OF INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) was established by the 1995 Dayton Accords as the primary instrument of international civilian oversight in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its authority was expanded through the extra-constitutional “Bonn Powers”—a framework that from its inception created a paradox between external supervision and domestic democratic development. Christian Schmidt, appointed as High Representative in 2021 without UN Security Council confirmation, deepened this contradiction: his use of the Bonn Powers generated opposition across ethnic lines, while his confrontation with Republika Srpska exposed the OHR’s enforcement mechanisms as ultimately counterproductive. The structural fragility of his mandate was further exposed as Germany and the European Union pursued their strategic interests through the OHR, and the Trump administration shifted toward transactional engagement, demanding Schmidt’s removal as part of what available evidence suggests was a broader political arrangement with Banja Luka. What Schmidt leaves behind is therefore not a personal legacy, but a geopolitical one: the collapse of the unified Western consensus that was always the true source of the OHR’s authority.

### INTRODUCTION

The recent news of the resignation of the High Representative (HR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)—Christian Schmidt—did not come as a surprise.<sup>1</sup> This is partly because the HR’s term has no fixed time limit, unlike most political terms, but more importantly because of growing pressure from within BiH and from external powers holding a stake in the region. Since his arrival, Schmidt has been portrayed as an “illegal and illegitimate self-imposed ruler,” mainly by the

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1 “Kristijan Šmit podneo ostavku na mesto visokog predstavnika u BiH” [Christian Schmidt Resigned from the Position of High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina], *RTS*, May 10, 2026, <https://www.rts.rs/vesti/region/5946678/kristijan-smit-ostavka-visoki-predstavnik-bih.html>.

leaders of the country's Serbian political entity, Republika Srpska (RS).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Schmidt has also earned a bad reputation among other ethnicities within the country.<sup>3</sup> Even with all the internal pressure that Schmidt faced, his mandate was resilient for a time. The United States as a major global player remained relatively silent in the region, especially in BiH, where the stakes are high. It was indirectly involved through organizations like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID),<sup>4</sup> relying on its European allies and the OHR to influence local policies on its behalf.<sup>5</sup> Such a U.S. attitude allowed European countries, such as Germany, to fill the power vacuum and install actors prioritizing their own interests. As BiH—a country devastated by the wars in the 1990s—represents fertile ground for foreign influence, it has also presented an opportunity to disrupt the broader Western Balkan region. Both Serbia and Croatia have ethnic minorities living within BiH, which has given them significant stakes in its internal stability. It is also worth noting that there is broad nominal consensus across BiH's political spectrum in favor of abolishing the OHR, although the visions behind that consensus are fundamentally incompatible: Dodik's camp seeks RS as a de facto independent entity; the Bosniak mainstream generally favors a centralized state with full civic equality; while the Croatian party HDZ aims for greater Croat cantonal autonomy. In such a political environment, even though all three ethnicities formally oppose the idea of the OHR's existence, their contradicting interests are only enhancing the argument for preserving OHR authority as a necessary mechanism of internal mediation.

2 “Dodik: Deklaracija Srbije i RS jasno označila Šmita kao lažnog visokog predstavnika” [Dodik: The Declaration of Serbia and Republika Srpska Clearly Designated Schmidt as a Fake High Representative], *Danas*, June 9, 2024, <https://www.danas.rs/svet/region/dodik-deklaracija-srbije-i-rs-jasno-oznacila-smita-kao-laznog-visok-og-predstavnika/>.

3 “Vođe oporbenih stranaka s hrvatskim predznakom: Schmidtove odluke usložnjavaju procese u BiH” [Leaders of Opposition Parties with Croatian Affiliations: Schmidt's Decisions Complicate Processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina], *Glas Hrvatske*, October 3, 2022, <https://glashrvatske.hrt.hr/hr/vijesti-iz-bih/vođe-opozicijskih-stranaka-s-hrvatskim-predznakom-schmidtove-odluke-usložnjavaju-procese-u-bih-10020703>.

4 “USAID Suspension in BiH: A Hard Blow to Media and Civil Society,” *Balkan Insight*, February 13, 2025, [https://www.balkanicaucaso.org/en/cp\\_article/usaids-suspension-in-bih-a-hard-blow-to-media-and-civil-society/](https://www.balkanicaucaso.org/en/cp_article/usaids-suspension-in-bih-a-hard-blow-to-media-and-civil-society/).

5 “The EU's Humiliating Failure in Bosnia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 5, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2021/11/the-eus-humiliating-failure-in-bosnia>.

## THE OHR AND THE LOGIC OF THE POST-DAYTON SYSTEM

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) emerged as part of the post-Dayton political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). It began with the 1995 Dayton Accords, signed by the president of Croatia, the president of Serbia (at that time the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), and the president of BiH (representing Muslim Bosniaks). The agreement was reached with U.S. mediation, with the main objective being to end the three-year war and put in place a foundation for the creation of a new federal state in the Balkans.<sup>6</sup> The OHR was a central part, created as the main institution responsible for supervising the civilian implementation of the peace agreement.<sup>7</sup> From the very beginning, the OHR represented an instrument through which the international community sought to preserve stability in a deeply divided post-conflict society. As BiH emerged devastated from the wars in the 1990s, international supervision was seen as necessary in order to prevent renewed political and ethnic confrontation.

However, the authority of the OHR was significantly expanded after the 1997 Bonn Conference, where the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) granted the High Representative extensive executive authorities, commonly referred to as the “Bonn Powers.”<sup>8</sup> These powers enabled the OHR to impose legislation, remove both elected and appointed officials, and intervene directly in constitutional and institutional disputes. In other words, PIC granted unlimited power to a non-elected foreign individual. The legal picture is more nuanced. Under Annex 10 of the Dayton Agreement, the HR is to be appointed “in accordance with relevant UNSC resolutions,” but in practice appointments have always been made by the PIC Steering Board first and only subsequently acknowledged by the UN Security Council (UNSC)—retrospectively, and by consensus. Schmidt’s appointment followed the same path, but Russian and Chinese opposition blocked any UNSC endorsement, providing Banja Luka with a formal pretext to contest his legitimacy—a position that also served Moscow’s broader interest in retaining leverage over BiH’s governance architecture. Therefore, it raises questions of legality and legitimacy even today. Nevertheless, the “Bonn Powers” were considered necessary due to the assumption that

6 “Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://bih.osce.org/bih/126173>.

7 “General Information,” Office of the High Representative, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://www.ohr.int/about-ohr/general-information/>.

8 Office of the High Representative, “Mandate,” accessed June 7, 2026, <https://www.ohr.int/about-ohr/mandate/>.

domestic political elites are unable to independently ensure the functionality of the state because of persistent ethnonational divisions and competing political interests. BiH's population is roughly 50 percent Bosniak, 30 percent Serb, and 15 percent Croat—a composition that underlies the persistent concern that dismantling the ethnic quota system would produce Bosniak political dominance and further power centralization in BiH.<sup>9</sup> To a certain extent, the assumption regarding the necessity of the “Bonn Powers” mechanism is fairly accurate, as BiH has often been labeled a low-capacity state, frequently failing to implement various projects that require consensus among ethnicities.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the post-Dayton political system in BiH proved to be contradictory. While the OHR was established as a mechanism to preserve stability and prevent institutional deadlock, its continued presence simultaneously limited the development of full domestic political sovereignty. At the same time, the extensive powers of the OHR reduced incentives for domestic political compromise and thus weakened the development of democratic accountability and institutional maturity locally, as often claimed even by domestic political leaders.<sup>11</sup> Over time, some political actors in the country began to silently rely on external arbitration, while vocally advocating for the constitutional statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For this reason, the OHR has the image of a guarantor of post-war stability but also represents Bosnia and Herzegovina's incomplete sovereignty, and its powers call into question decision-making within the Dayton political order, creating a paradoxical situation where democratic maturity became an abstract term in the country in recent decades and could remain so for the years to come.

The “5+2 Agenda” sets out the conditions under which the OHR can formally close—among them the resolution of state and defense property disputes, fiscal sustainability, and a broadly defined “rule of law” criterion vague enough to resist any objective measurement. Nearly thirty years after Dayton, not a single item on that list has been met. However, the great powers sitting on the PIC Steering Board have never had a genuine interest in seeing those

9 “BiH: Danas rezultati popisa iz 2013. godine” [BiH: 2013 Census Results Today], *Al Jazeera Balkans*, June 29, 2016, <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2016/6/29/bih-danas-rezultati-popisa-iz-2013-godine>.

10 Jelena Vujanović, “Bosnia and Herzegovina as a Weak State,” *Baština* 33, no. 61 (2023): 193–205, <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina33-46683>.

11 “Milorad Dodik: RS neće prihvatiti visokog predstavnika bez UN procedure” [Milorad Dodik: Republika Srpska Will Not Accept a High Representative Without a UN Procedure], *Faktor*, May 27, 2025, <https://faktor.ba/bosna-i-hercegovina/aktuelno/milorad-dodik-rs-neze-prihvatiti-visokog-predstavnika-bez-un-procedure/254308>.

conditions met: the OHR gives them direct institutional leverage over BiH that no ordinary diplomatic channel could replicate, which makes the whole logic of the 5+2 agenda contradictory.

### **SCHMIDT’S MANDATE: LEGITIMACY CRISIS, POLITICAL INTERVENTION, AND CONFRONTATION WITH REPUBLIKA SRPSKA**

Christian Schmidt assumed the role of High Representative in August 2021 under circumstances that immediately undermined his institutional standing. He was the eighth to hold the position; his predecessor Paddy Ashdown exercised the Bonn Powers roughly 430 times between 2002 and 2006,<sup>12</sup> yet Schmidt’s comparatively fewer but more targeted interventions have proved far more damaging to the OHR’s political authority. Although not legally necessary, unlike all the previous High Representatives, his appointment did not receive a UNSC endorsement—though such endorsement was retrospective in all prior cases as well.<sup>13</sup> It opened a procedural gap that Russia and China exploited to declare his mandate illegitimate, with Republika Srpska’s leadership adopting the same position. Milorad Dodik is the most central and dominant political figure in the RS entity, leader of the most powerful political party, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), former president of RS, and a politician who began his career as a Western-backed reformist before gradually reorienting toward Moscow and an openly secessionist agenda.<sup>14</sup> This procedural gap in the appointment procedure of the HR provided justification to obstruct Schmidt’s decisions rhetorically throughout his entire tenure, effectively damaging the OHR’s capacity to function as a credible enforcement mechanism even before Schmidt had made a single decision.

Schmidt’s use of the Bonn Powers proved consistently controversial, generating opposition from across the BiH political spectrum rather than consolidating support for the peace framework he was tasked with enforcing. His most controversial early intervention came on election night in October 2022, when Schmidt unilaterally imposed changes to the electoral law in BiH. The constitutional amendments increased the size of the Federation House of

12 “Paddy Ashdown: The Only Hope for BiH is Change of Generations,” *Sarajevo Times*, November 15, 2016, <https://sarajevotimes.com/paddy-ashdown-hope-bih-change-generations/>.

13 Anna Orosz, “High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Is the More Interventionist Way the Right Way to Go?,” *Foreign Policy Review* 16, no. 1 (2023): 134–145, <https://doi.org/10.47706/KKIFPR.2023.1.134-145>.

14 Adnan Huskić, “Dodik’s Fall: The End of an Era?,” Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, August 13, 2025, <https://www.freiheit.org/western-balkans/dodiks-fall-end-era>.

Peoples, modified the allocation and voting thresholds of its ethnic caucuses, and introduced new procedures and deadlines for the appointment of the Federation’s executive authorities in order to reduce institutional deadlock—all without prior public consultation or parliamentary procedure.<sup>15</sup> Such decisions by Schmidt were supported by the U.S. embassy under the Biden administration, while EU counterparts publicly distanced themselves.<sup>16</sup> The suspension of the Federation Constitution in 2023 to unblock government formation further sparked debates about the OHR’s role as a neutral arbiter.<sup>17</sup> Rather than narrowing the political divisions within BiH, Schmidt’s interventions undoubtedly deepened them, altering the domestic political landscape and reinforcing the narrative—advanced most vocally by the leaders of Serbian ethnicity—that the OHR operated as an instrument of foreign interference rather than of neutral peace enforcement.<sup>18</sup>

The confrontation with Republika Srpska reached its peak when the RS National Assembly unilaterally adopted laws directly nullifying the authority of the BiH Constitutional Court on entity territory.<sup>19</sup> Schmidt immediately exercised his Bonn powers and annulled the laws,<sup>20</sup> but Dodik signed them regardless and was subsequently convicted by the Constitutional Court of BiH for not respecting the decisions of the HR—a verdict that, rather than resolving the constitutional crisis, exposed its full depth.<sup>21</sup> The RS leadership rejected the conviction, and the state-level enforcement mechanism proved incapable of compelling compliance,

15 Samir Huseinović, “‘Paket funkcionalnosti’: Christian Schmidt promijenio Izborni zakon i Ustav FBiH” [‘Package of Functionalities’: Christian Schmidt Changed the Election Law and the Constitution of the FBiH], *Deutsche Welle*, October 2, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/bs/paket-funkcionalnosti-christian-schmidt-promijenio-izborni-zakon-i-ustav-fbih/a-63315858>.

16 Maja Sahadžić, “The Bonn Powers in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” ConstitutionNet, November 29, 2022, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/bonn-powers-bosnia-and-herzegovina-between-rock-and-hard-place>.

17 Azem Kurtić, “Bosnia High Representative Breaks Deadlock in Federation Entity Again,” *Balkan Insight*, April 28, 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/04/28/bosnia-high-representative-breaks-deadlock-in-federation-entity-again/bj>.

18 “Dokić: Dodik upozoravao, a Nikšić potvrdio – bošnjačku politiku vode stranci” [Dokić: Dodik Warned, and Nikšić Confirmed – Bosniak Politics Are Led by Foreigners], *Provjereno*, April 30, 2025, <https://provjereno.info/lar/politika/dokic-dodik-upozoravao-a-niksic-potvrdio-bosnjacku-politiku-vode-stranci/13955>.

19 “Republika Srpska Has Adopted a Law That Bans the Implementation of Decisions Made by the Constitutional Court of BiH,” *European Western Balkans*, June 28, 2023, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/06/28/republika-srpska-has-adopted-a-law-that-bans-the-implementation-of-decisions-made-by-the-constitutional-court-of-bih>.

20 “Bosnia and Herzegovina Upholds Rule of Law as Constitutional Court Suspends Disputed RS Laws,” Office of the High Representative, July 1, 2023, <https://www.ohr.int/bosnia-and-herzegovina-upholds-rule-of-law-as-constitutional-court-suspends-disputed-rs-laws/>.

21 Maja Sahadžić, “Constitutional Standoff in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Drama in Four Acts (So Far),” ConstitutionNet, April 28, 2025, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/constitutional-standoff-bosnia-and-herzegovina-drama-four-acts-so-far>.

which further exposed cracks within the BiH rule of law mechanism, proving the point that the current legal and decision-making system is highly flawed and unsustainable.

In the meantime, Washington, which previously backed Schmidt's authority, lifted sanctions on Dodik in October 2025 without explanation, effectively signaling that the political cost of confrontation with Banja Luka had exceeded what the Trump administration was willing to bear.<sup>22</sup> Some sources suggest that the sanctions were lifted as a result of Dodik's extensive lobbying in Washington, as well as the current U.S. administration's business interests in the country.<sup>23</sup> Such a shift signals the beginning of a transactional relationship rather than an institutionalized approach to the OHR.

## GERMANY, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF WESTERN POLICY

Schmidt's resignation has exposed a fundamental breakdown in Western strategic coherence toward BiH. The idea of Trump administration to demand Schmidt's immediate removal—reportedly done in increasingly blunt terms and as an ultimatum—represents far more than a personnel dispute.<sup>24</sup> It signals a deliberate and swift shift in U.S. policy in BiH, away from decades of the joint Western policy of peace enforcement through the OHR and toward a transactional model in which geopolitical and economic interests take precedence over institutional continuity. The clearest indicator of this shift came during the May 12 session of the UN Security Council, when U.S. Deputy Ambassador Tammy Bruce stated that the OHR “was never intended to be permanent” and called for Schmidt's successor to hold a “far more limited set of responsibilities.”<sup>25</sup> This statement from the U.S. official effectively echoes a position long held by Milorad

22 Daria Sito-Sucic, “US Lifts Sanctions on Bosnian Serb Leader Dodik and His Allies,” *Reuters*, October 29, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-lifts-sanctions-bosnian-serb-leader-dodik-his-allies-2025-10-29/>.

23 Esad Širbegović, “Why Did US Let Dodik Off the Hook and Hand Europe's Ailing Heart to Russia?,” *Al Jazeera*, November 14, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/11/14/why-did-us-let-dodik-off-the-hook-and-hand-europes-ailing-heart-to-russia>.

24 “Christian Schmidt se pod pritiskom SAD povlači iz OHR-a, a ostaje na čelu OHR-a do izbora novog predstavnika” [Christian Schmidt Is Withdrawing from the OHR Under Pressure from the United States but Will Remain Head of the OHR Until the Election of a New Representative], *Radio Srebrenik*, May 18, 2025, <https://www.radiosrebrenik.ba/christian-schmidt-se-pod-pritiskom-sad-povlaci-iz-ohr-a-ostaje-na-celu-ohr-a-do-izbora-novog-predstavnika>.

25 “US Says Next Bosnia Peace Envoy Will Have More Limited Role,” *Internazionale*, May 12, 2026, <https://www.internazionale.it/ultime-notizie-reuters/2026/05/12/us-says-next-bosnia-peace-envoy-will-have-more-limited-role>.

Dodik, Russia, and China—actors whose opposition to the OHR has historically been rooted in the desire to diminish its mechanisms within the post-Dayton framework.

This apparent convergence of U.S. and Russian–Serb positions on the OHR’s future cannot be dismissed as coincidental. It sits within a broader pattern of transactional dealmaking that has characterized U.S. engagement with Republika Srpska under the Trump administration. In October 2025, Washington lifted Treasury Department sanctions against Dodik and his associates without public explanation. Additionally, leaks from credible sources have suggested that Schmidt’s removal was effectively part of a package deal negotiated between the SNSD and Trump’s inner circle, with energy concessions and political realignment exchanged for diplomatic cover.<sup>26</sup> At the center of this emerging arrangement is the Southern Gas Interconnection pipeline project, which would significantly expand the penetration of U.S. LNG into the Western Balkans and, in turn, revive Washington’s strategic presence in the region through energy leverage.<sup>27</sup> This energy deal was criticized by the EU and Schmidt on several occasions, which clearly reflects the widening gap between Washington’s transactional approach and the EU’s institutional one, while revealing Schmidt’s alignment of interests as well.<sup>28</sup> While such a quid pro quo arrangement between Dodik and the Trump administration cannot be definitively proven, the circumstantial alignment of interests—the lifting of sanctions, the pipeline deal, and the demand for Schmidt’s exit—points toward a structured political arrangement rather than a series of unrelated developments.

Germany’s approach throughout Schmidt’s mandate further illustrates the fragmentation of Western policy. Berlin’s strategy of placing its own national interest at the center of BiH policy—channeling diplomatic influence through actors aligned with German economic and political priorities—contributed to a gradual erosion of the unified “Western approach” that had historically

26 “FAZ: SAD potkopavaju autoritet Christiana Schmidta” [FAZ: The United States Is Undermining the Authority of Christian Schmidt], *Deutsche Welle*, December 20, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/bs/faz-sad-potkopavaju-autoritet-christiana-schmidta/a-74995006>; “The Tussle over Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *German-Foreign-Policy.com*, May 12, 2026, <https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/en/news/detail/i0400>.

27 Vladimir Spasić, “BiH, Croatia Signed Agreement on Southern Gas Interconnection,” *Balkan Green Energy News*, July 24, 2024, <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/bih-croatia-signed-agreement-on-southern-gas-interconnection/>.

28 Katja Giebel and Paola Petrić, “3 Questions on the Resignation of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Heinrich Böll Stiftung Brussels, May 13, 2026, <https://eu.boell.org/en/2026/05/13/3-questions-resignation-high-representative-bosnia-and-herzegovina-paola-petric>.

underpinned the OHR's authority.<sup>29</sup> Rather than reinforcing shared Euro-Atlantic objectives, the competition between European capitals for influence in Sarajevo created an opening that Washington and, by extension, actors aligned with Moscow have exploited.

The following period will undoubtedly further expose cracks in the already fragmented Western approach in BiH. Since the second Trump administration is openly confronting the EU on a wide range of global and regional policies, the case of the OHR will be no different. Ideas that the EU should take a more pragmatic role and thus prevail in terms of power and influence in the OHR are already in the public discourse, endorsed in European media.<sup>30</sup> Needless to say, regardless of which side prevails in such a struggle for power, the role of the OHR will be significantly weaker, as it will no longer enjoy the full support of the "collective West" as it once did. It should also be acknowledged that responsibility for this situation does not rest solely with external actors: BiH's political elites across all three constituent peoples have consistently prioritized ethnic mobilization over the cross-ethnic compromise that sustainable statehood would require.

### WHAT LEGACY DOES SCHMIDT LEAVE BEHIND?

Schmidt's tenure leaves behind an OHR structurally weakened not by any single decision, but by the accumulated erosion of its political foundations. While the office formally retains its Bonn Powers, the conditions under which those powers can be meaningfully exercised have deteriorated significantly. The persistent delegitimization campaign mounted by Republika Srpska, combined with Washington's open endorsement of a reduced OHR mandate, has effectively narrowed the political space within which any successor can operate.

The succession process offers little reassurance in this regard. Schmidt requested that the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board identify his successor, confirming that he will remain in his post until the search concludes. The June 3–4 PIC meeting in Sarajevo ended without agreement: Washington

29 "Zaangażowanie polityczno-wojskowe Niemiec na rzecz wzmocnienia stabilności i bezpieczeństwa Bośni i Hercegowiny" [Germany's Political and Military Engagement to Strengthen Stability and Security in Bosnia and Herzegovina], Institute of Central Europe, January 19, 2023, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/zaangazowanie-polityczno-wojskowe-niemiec-na-rzecz-wzmocnienia-stabilnosci-i-bezpieczenstwa-bosni-i-hercegowiny>; Harun Karčić, "Germany, Russia and the Gambit in Bosnia," Royal United Services Institute, April 15, 2021, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/germany-russia-and-gambit-bosnia>.

30 Kurt Bassuener, "It's Time Europe Asserted Leadership and Challenged the US in Bosnia," *Balkan Insight*, May 18, 2026, <https://balkaninsight.com/2026/05/18/its-time-europe-asserted-leadership-and-challenged-the-us-in-bosnia/bi/>.

backed Italian diplomat Antonio Zanardi Landi—seen as favoring a significantly reduced OHR mandate—while France, Germany, and the United Kingdom supported French diplomat René Troccaz. The U.S. Embassy subsequently blamed “European failure to reach consensus” and warned it may reconsider its role in BiH’s international supervision, with consultations set to continue through the end of June.<sup>31</sup> The European resistance to the American candidate may buy time to develop a strategy on how to preserve influence and protect their interests in the region. An office that once derived its authority from what was presented as unified Western backing now faces a fractured international consensus—and an incoming mandate explicitly designed to facilitate its own diminishment.

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of Schmidt’s legacy is the precedent set by the circumstances of his departure. That a High Representative can be pressured into resignation through external political dealmaking—rather than through the legitimate “5+2” process—fundamentally undermines the institutional logic of the OHR itself.<sup>32</sup> It signals to domestic actors that the office’s authority is contingent on great-power alignment and exposes the weakening justification for maintaining the peace framework it was established to enforce. In a country where institutional credibility is already fragile, that signal carries consequences well beyond the question of personnel.

A further deterioration of constitutional credibility within BiH carries a risk of enhancing the idea of secessionism and eventually the collapse of the post-war Dayton system. Some effects are already noticeable. With the challenges emerging during Schmidt’s mandate, BiH risks not only its political stability, but also the economic development of the country, as BiH is one of the poorest and slowest growing countries on the “old continent.” Due to rule of law issues and democratic backsliding, BiH is losing billions of euros of possible investment.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, economic growth is modest and living standards are far behind those of other European countries.<sup>34</sup>

31 Julian Borger, “US Threatens to Reconsider Role in Bosnia and Herzegovina amid Rift with Europe,” *The Guardian*, June 6, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jun/06/us-threatens-to-reconsider-role-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-amid-rift-with-europe>.

32 “Agenda 5+2,” Office of the High Representative, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://www.ohr.int/agenda-52/>.

33 Nemanja Plotan, “High Representative and Low FDI: Foreign Authority as the Cause of Bosnia’s Economic Paralysis,” Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development, 2025, <https://cirsd.org/horizon-article/high-representative-and-low-fdi-foreign-authority-as-the-cause-of-bosnia-economic-paralysis/>.

34 Olja Belic et al., *Can the Western Balkans Converge towards EU Living Standards?* (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2023), [https://www.ebrd.com/content/dam/ebpd\\_dxp/assets/pdfs/communications-department/1716-Western%2BBalkans%2Bconvergence%2Bpaper\\_final-web.pdf](https://www.ebrd.com/content/dam/ebpd_dxp/assets/pdfs/communications-department/1716-Western%2BBalkans%2Bconvergence%2Bpaper_final-web.pdf).

Milorad Dodik—Schmidt’s most vocal adversary—vowed on numerous occasions that he “will not allow Schmidt’s legacy to exist.”<sup>35</sup> History, as it often does, may prove him mistaken—though not in the way he imagined: Christian Schmidt will be remembered not for who he was, but for what his tenure revealed—that the Office of the High Representative crossed a point of no return long before his resignation.

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35 Dragana Ignjić, “Oko: Šmit odlazi, nemirna Bosna ostaje?” [Oko: Schmidt Is Leaving, Turbulent Bosnia Remains?], posted May 11, 2026, by RTS Oko, YouTube, 30 min., 2 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slz-TCs0aOFY>.



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