



Russia and China in Liberal Peacebuilding: Perceptions and Engagement with the Dayton Peace Process in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

This report draws from a dataset charting the trends in Russian and Chinese perceptions of institutions responsible for the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Accords) between 2000 and 2023. Our ambition is to elucidate and compare the attitudes of these actors towards the long-running peace process underwritten largely by Western states. These perceptions were drawn from statements made by Chinese and Russian representatives at United Nations Security Council meetings during which the reports of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (HiRep) were discussed.

Our analysis shows that Russia and China differ significantly in their approaches and attitudes towards the peace process but have both experienced a negative trend towards some of the core Dayton institutions over time. The data also show a preoccupation with certain institutions over others, with Russia placing a far greater emphasis on the institutions implementing civilian aspects of the Dayton Accords, and China underscoring the military ones.

Data on the attitudes towards the key civilian institution, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), indicate that as Russia's global foreign policy became more assertive, its perceptions of the institution declined. Similar, but less stark, trends in Russian perceptions of other Dayton institutions occurred. We see these trends as primarily connected to the developments in Russia, not Bosnia and Herzegovina. Meanwhile, Chinese perceptions of the OHR show that procedural disagreements in the appointment of the current High Representative by the Peace Implementation Council precipitated the negative inclination in Chinese attitudes towards the institution. While Beijing's economic interests in the country have increased in recent years, there is a clear link between the unorthodox appointment of High Representative Christian Schmidt and the decline in China's estimations of the OHR. Furthermore, China has been more consistent in its support for the European military mission (EUFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia has recently started criticising this mission, especially since 2022, coinciding with its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

We see these discrepancies in the positions of both countries as important for Western states' and international organisations' approach to working with the two powers to further the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- ▶ Russia and China have largely diverged in their perceptions of and approaches to key international institutions responsible for the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). However, both have experienced a negative trend towards some of the core Dayton institutions over time.
- ▶ Our analysis shows a preoccupation with certain institutions over others; Russia places a greater emphasis on the institutions implementing civilian aspects of the Dayton Accords, and China underscores the military ones.
- ▶ In Russia's case:
 - Russia continuously praised the work of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) until a shift in discourse in 2008. This was despite the High Representative (HiRep) using executive powers to facilitate prosecuting war criminals and supporting reforms moving BiH towards Euro-Atlantic integration.
 - The negative turn in Russian discourse towards the OHR is related to developments in BiH, but also coincided with Russia's more assertive foreign policy globally. Criticism of the OHR intensified while Valentin Inzko was the High Representative (2009–2021) despite his relative inactivity, indicating the degree of influence geopolitical developments had on Russia's engagement with the official peace process in BiH.
 - Since 2021, after Christian Schmidt was appointed as the new HiRep without Russian approval, Moscow has maintained that the position continues to remain vacant, refusing to accept his reports. Schmidt's appointment also aligned near-perfectly with increasing tensions around Ukraine and Russia's full-scale invasion of the country in 2022. This has meant that the criticism of the OHR spilled over into criticism of other institutions.
 - Russian disapproval of the OHR oversight body, the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board (PIC), came later than that directed toward the OHR. Until relatively recently, Russia, a member of PIC's Steering Board, saw the institution as playing an important oversight role in the Bosnian peace process. The negative sentiment became more pronounced after Russia was "outvoted" on the appointment of the new HiRep in 2021.

- The negative turn in Russia's attitudes towards the European Union Force in BiH (EUFOR) in 2022 similarly coincided with its full-scale invasion in Ukraine and Schmidt's appointment.
 - Little mention was made of other institutions responsible for peace implementation in BiH over the years, especially compared to other UNSC members. However, while rarely mentioned by Russian representatives, perceptions of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) also soured over the last decade. Interestingly, the criticism of the ICTY intensified after the tribunal ceased its operation in 2017.
- In China's case:
- China remained largely positive about all the key international institutions in BiH until 2020, roughly concurrent with Christian Schmidt's unorthodox appointment as the High Representative, due to the disagreements on the PIC Steering Board.
 - For two decades (2000–2019), Chinese representatives consistently expressed support for the High Representative in UNSC debates. They praised the OHR's effectiveness in implementing the reforms in sectors crucial to the stability of the country. The lack of direct criticism when the High Representatives were passing laws or dismissing officials indicates that while China was discursively supporting the norms of non-intervention and sovereignty, it was primarily interested in stability in BiH. The OHR was seen to facilitate this stability.
 - The negative turn in Chinese discourse towards the OHR in recent years is linked to procedural issues with Christian Schmidt's appointment and with Beijing's wish to support its ally Russia.
 - Unlike Russia, who has recently levied criticism towards the EUFOR mission, China has been consistently positive about international military missions overseeing Dayton implementation.

- China has largely refrained from expressing sentiments about the Euro-Atlantic dimensions of the Dayton peace process and the role of the OHR, EUFOR, or ICTY in this. Russia, conversely, has criticised this trajectory for the last decade and a half.
- ▶ Our key recommendation for Western policy makers and international organisations responsible for implementing the peace process in BiH is to remember the vastly different motivations driving Russian and Chinese negative discourses towards the Bosnian peace process and international institutions. While discursively supporting its ally Russia and objecting to procedural issues, our analysis of discrepancies between the two countries indicates that China remains primarily interested in stability in the region. Bearing in mind this distinction between China and Russia could allow the West to productively engage China in seeking solutions for the Bosnian peace process.

Introduction

Dayton Peace Agreement and the Changing Global Order

The conclusion of The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Agreement, the Accords) – signed on 25 November 1995 – signified the formal cessation of the most violent conflict in Europe since World War II. The Accords and its 11 annexes are a quintessential comprehensive peace agreement, brokered under the leadership of the United States (US). The agreement is a result of a precarious 21-day marathon of proximity talks which, without a decisive victory on the ground, attempted to satisfy all three main ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. The Accords outlined a highly complex web of domestic institutions, detailing a multi-level political structure. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was envisioned as a single state composed of two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) (mostly Bosniak and Croat) and the Republika Srpska (RS) (mostly Serb) – with FBiH further subdivided into ten cantons. Linking these was a weak state-level structure with a heavily circumscribed list of responsibilities. With minor amendments, this structure continues today, as despite repeated attempts the constitutional structure was never successfully renegotiated.

Because of how the Dayton Accords were concluded, the document itself is a “masterpiece of ambiguity” (Rothstein, 1999). While this ambiguity facilitated the adoption of the Accords, it has complicated their implementation (Bieber, 2008). Faced with the challenge of implementing a complex and ambiguous peace agreement in a highly divided society, a variety of international organisations were called upon to supervise, facilitate, and, if necessary, intervene in various aspects of the process. Although some of these organisations have since departed, changed their mandates, or transferred their responsibilities to other actors, key international institutions remain active in the country for oversight, nearly three decades after the successful conclusion of the peace agreement. Despite the cessation of hostilities almost 30 years ago, the peace process and the implementation of Dayton provisions are ongoing.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has undergone significant changes over the last three decades, as has the world. While the late 1990s witnessed the height of the unipolar order and the dominance of liberal actors and ideas on the international stage, today’s world is much more fragmented.

Geopolitical tensions are spilling into conflict management and peace processes everywhere. In this paper, we assess how these geopolitical tensions have translated into the implementation of an agreement brokered in a different era. Specifically, we look at how actors often described as illiberal, namely Russia and China, have interacted over time with a peace agreement and process that was initiated during a period when the international system was dominated by liberal democratic states and designs.

Due to BiH's geographical location on the border of the European Union (EU) and the US' sustained involvement, Western states and organisations have been by far the most important external actors in the implementation of BiH peace. Most discussion of external approaches and critiques of international engagement has therefore been directed at them (Bargués and Morillas 2021; Perry 2012; Peter 2015). However, over the last decade or so, research has also started examining the increasing involvement of other actors. Much of their contribution has been economic, which shows the trajectory of BiH development from a post-war country. However, some political actors in BiH have been keen to move away from the Western-led liberal peacebuilding process and embrace other approaches (ECFR, 2024; Türkcan and Keşvelioğlu, 2020). This development has gone hand in hand with democratic backsliding in the country and the region (Kapidžić 2021). In addition to the roles of Russia and China, which are the focus of our paper, Turkey (Sofos 2024) and the Gulf States (Prelec 2024) *have been of particular interest to scholars*.

China and Russia have been important external actors in the Western Balkans throughout the post-Dayton period, but their role has been growing and changing in recent years. Over the past 15 years, there has been a notable increase in Chinese economic involvement in the region, alongside a heightened focus by Russia on political and security manoeuvring and soft-power initiatives (Metodieva 2019; Stanicek and Tarpova 2022). Existing literature on Russia focuses on its limited but important economic engagement with BiH and the broader Western Balkan region, especially as a cornerstone of Russia's plans to develop the region into an energy transportation route (Čančar, 2021; Hoxhaj 2023). Scholarly discourse also addresses Russia's political and socio-cultural initiatives aimed at fostering closer ties with the Serbian populace and leadership and bringing these elites and the region closer to Russia's sphere of influence (Gueudet, 2023; Mahmutaj, 2023; Muzaferiya, 2023; Ronc 2022). China's engagement with BiH has largely centred around economic and development initiatives, so analyses of their bilateral relations reflect this dynamic.

However, recent scholarship also grounds China's economic engagement in its peacebuilding strategy and alternative visions of the global order ([ECFR, 2024](#); [Hasić, 2022](#); [Huskić, 2020](#); [Vangeli, 2024](#)). Many recent works on Russian and Chinese relations with BiH highlight how global developments such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war have interacted with these bilateral relations by producing opportunities and motivations for increased diplomacy and investment, as well as challenges not only for these actors but also for Western states and the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Focus and Methodology

To contribute to this growing body of research, this report uses primary data to construct a detailed picture of how China and Russia interact with the official peace process in BiH through formal forums. Using primary data extracted from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC, Council) meeting notes on BiH from 2000 to the present, we chart Russia's and China's UNSC activities and perceptions towards the institutions responsible for implementing the Dayton Accords and the BiH peace process. The report elucidates how Russia and China have engaged with a number of key institutions over the last two decades, seeking to explain some of the changing trends in Chinese and Russian perceptions and behaviours. It situates these within critical junctures of their foreign policies.

The data was collected from the [UNSC meeting records](#) where the OHR's reports on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was presented and discussed individually by the members of the UNSC bi-annually, giving us 48 data points per country. Consistent OHR briefings and scope for individual members to comment became commonplace after 2000. Hence, the data used in this report are taken from 2000 to the present day, although when relevant for individual institutions, we also explored the first five years post-Dayton.

Russian and Chinese statements on individual institutions were coded into three categories: *negative*, *neutral*, or *positive*. If no statement was made about a particular institution, it was coded as a non-mention. A statement was coded as negative if there were more negative statements than positive, or if there was at least one negative statement alongside neutral ones. Similarly, *positive* statements were coded as such when there were more positive statements than negative, and when there was at least one positive statement alongside neutral ones. *Neutral* statements were coded as such when there were equal positive and negative statements, or if statements were purely factual. *Positive* and *negative* statements were coded based on the sentiment portrayed by the verb used. As such, verbs such as, amongst others, "welcome", "praise", "commend", "support", "appreciate", "thank" indicated a positive sentiment. Furthermore, positivity was also coded when an actor expressed an intention of continued cooperation and collaboration with a specific institution, or a preference for a specific institution. Negative sentiments included verbs such as "condemn", "denounce", "to be concerned", "to be outraged". Additionally, negative sentiments were coded when a delegate expressed the desire for the drawing down or removal of a specific institution, or a preference to work outside of its mandate, such as with boycotts or disengagement.

The data are presented in stacked bar charts. Each graph displays two data points per year, reflecting the two annual meetings on BiH. As such, when a column reaches 2, it indicates that there were two positive statements made that year. Similarly, if it reaches -2, there were two negative statements made that year. Columns that reach 1 or -1 indicate that one positive or negative statement was made in the same year a neutral statement was made or if there was no mention of the institution during the other meeting occurring in the same year. A circle on the X axis denotes a neutral statement. In some years a bar and circle may be present, indicating that one of the two annual meetings contained a negative or positive statement while a neutral one occurred in the other meeting.

Civilian Institutions of the Dayton Peace Process

Unlike the military side of the peace implementation effort, which was entrusted solely to the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and its successors, the civilian presence has included a vast array of international actors asked to supervise, facilitate and, if need be, intervene in the various aspects and phases of the peace process (cf. Kostakos 1998). The High Representative (HiRep) is the key international institution wielding considerable powers in the country. The role is akin to a coordinator of all civilian implementation aspects. However, their authority over the various international agencies is considerably restricted.

Much of the analysis below focuses on China and Russia's perception of the HiRep and his Office (OHR), alongside their perception of the OHR's oversight body: the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). However, given the relative autonomy of other international institutions, we also examine their positions vis-a-vis the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH). In addition to these two institutions, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was one of the most important civilian international organisations involved in the implementation of the BiH peace agreement, especially in the early years. OSCE was responsible for organising and monitoring elections, and it also oversaw refugee return. However, because Russian and Chinese delegates made nearly no reference to this organisation in their statements from 2000 onwards, the report does not include an analysis of this institution.

Office of the High Representative (OHR) and Peace Implementation Council (PIC)

Overview and Powers

The Dayton Peace Agreement established the institution of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina under Article II of Annex 10. The HiRep was mandated to monitor the peace agreement's implementation; promote the compliance of the parties to the agreement; ensure and guide the civilian agencies' implementation of the peace agreement; resolve conflicts that occur regarding the implementation of the civilian aspects of the peace agreement; produce progress reports for the UN and interested governments and international organisations; and guide the UN-IPTF in its operations.

A week before the Dayton Accords were officially signed, the London Peace Implementation Conference set up the administrative structures for oversight of the High Representative. The parties agreed that a Peace Implementation Council (PIC) would subsume the work of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY). The PIC was to be comprised of all the states, international organisations and agencies attending the London Peace Implementation Conference; its main role was to “review progress in peace implementation”. The conclusions also established a Steering Board of the PIC, constituted representatives of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, the Presidency of the EU, the European Commission, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), represented by Turkey.

In practice, the HiRep would meet with the extended international community on very rare occasions, the last of which was in 2000. Most interaction occurs only with the Steering Board countries, and when actors refer to PIC, they tend to mean its Steering Board. China was never a member of the PIC Steering Board, while Russia remained actively involved until April 2022, when it stopped funding the OHR and withdrew from participation. The UN Security Council plays a marginal role in this set-up, serving as the body receiving reports from the HiRep and confirming decisions by the PIC Steering Board. However, as our analysis demonstrates, the discourse over the role of the UNSC vis-à-vis the PIC and the OHR has changed in recent years.

The role and the powers of the OHR have evolved during peace implementation. The most significant of these powers, which elevates the OHR from a monitoring and facilitation mission to an international administration, are the HiRep's power to interpret the peace agreement and their enforcement powers. The Dayton Peace Agreement made the High Representative “the final authority in theatre regarding interpretation of this [Dayton] Agreement on the civilian implementation of the peace [settlement](#).” Because of the ambiguities in the Dayton Accords this is an exceptionally important power. The Accords were not explicit about whether the HiRep would hold any enforcement powers to resolve conflicting interpretations during the peace process, but they do include a provision allowing the HiRep to essentially determine his own [powers](#).

Due to the intransigence of the local parties during the first two years, at its meeting in Bonn in 1997, PIC more explicitly confirmed the HiRep's enforcement powers, by "welcom[ing] the High Representative's intention to use his final authority in theatre regarding interpretation of the Agreement [...] in order to facilitate the resolution of difficulties by making binding decisions, as he judge[d] [necessary](#)." The so-called Bonn powers enabled the HiRep to pass binding legislation to unlock the peace process or annul legislation he deemed was obstructing [it](#). They also gave the HiRep powers to dismiss public officials who were obstructing the peace [process](#).

These interpretation and enforcement powers of the HiRep are one of the most expansive in any peacebuilding operation and strike at the heart of sovereignty and non-intervention debates, values that both Russia and China prioritise in their peacebuilding discourse ([Houghton, 2024](#); [Peter and Rice, 2022](#)). These are highly controversial powers and over the years have attracted substantial attention in scholarship and the policy community (Knaus and Martin 2003; Caplan 2005; Peter, 2013), but as the analysis below shows, were not uniformly objected to by Russia and China.

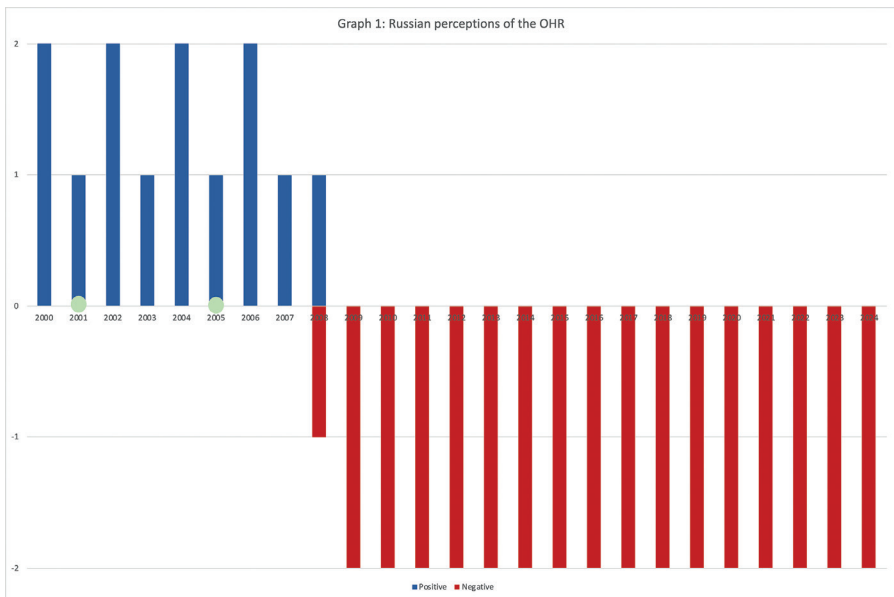
Discursive Trends on the OHR

Given that data was collected from UNSC meeting notes during which state representatives discussed the OHR's briefing to the UNSC, a mapping of Russia's and China's sentiments towards this institution are most illustrative of how the two powers have engaged and continue to engage with the official/multilateral peace process underwritten by the Dayton Accords. These perceptions also demonstrate how Russia and China are engaging generally with peace processes formulated and initiated during an era wherein liberal democratic actors were dominant within the international system. It provides further evidence and analysis of how these states view provisions for international oversight, including the institutionalisation of its supervision.

Russia and the OHR

A quick overview of the data — presented in Graph 1 — show that until 2008, Russia discursively supported the OHR, making positive statement and largely praising the actions of the institution, with only two neutral statements in 2001 and 2005. The year 2008 marked a shift in Russia's stance towards the OHR. From this point on, Russia consistently made negative statements about the HiRep's activities.

Graph 1: Russian perceptions of the OHR



While there are numerous factors shaping Russia's discourse about the OHR since 2000, including internal developments in BiH, changes in Moscow's discursive patterns coincided with key shifts within Russia's foreign policy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow had hoped that rapprochement with the West would bring benefits to Russia's economy and international relations. Concurrently, Moscow engaged largely positively with the liberal peacemaking and peacebuilding process in BiH, a process in which Western powers and institutions were dominant.

Between 2000 and 2008, Russia's sentiments about the OHR were consistently positive. But that does not mean that Russia did not raise concerns. In 2000, the Russian representative first warned against the OHR overusing its power to create a "protectorate of the international community" (UNSC, 2000). Similarly, while Moscow's overall stance towards the OHR in 2001 was positive, their representative expressed confusion about the proposal for cantonisation and other political reforms, as these were not specified in the Dayton Agreement. The sentiment was that the HiRep might be understanding his powers to interpret the peace agreement too broadly. Moscow also voiced trepidation at the prospect of the OHR unilaterally passing laws affecting state institutions (UNSC, 2001a). From 2002 there is a consistently positive attitude towards the OHR, coinciding with the appointment of Lord Paddy Ashdown to the Office.

During Lord Ashdown's tenure as High Representative (2002–2006), Russia's sentiments were positive, always praising the work of the HiRep and the progress made regarding the implementation of the peace agreement. This is somewhat surprising as Ashdown was the HiRep who used the Bonn Powers most extensively in ways that were not aligned with Russia's foreign policy priorities. Ashdown used Bonn Powers primarily to accelerate bringing suspected war criminals to the ICTY, the majority of which were Bosnian Serbs, and to facilitate a defence reform, which brought BiH closer to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). On one occasion in 2004, Ashdown conditionally removed 59 individuals from their posts for obstructing cooperation with the ICTY (OHR 2004). In 2003, he also undertook sweeping steps to facilitate the defence reform in the country. He established the Defence Reform Commission and heavily directed the local parties towards a new Defence Law, stopping short of imposing the law himself. A new defence law unifying armed forces under a single command was needed for BiH to join the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP). Although on the outside it seemed that all PIC Steering Board members supported conditioning Bosnian accession to the PfP programme on the defence reform, it was not so. Given the well-known Russian opposition to NATO's expansion to the East, it is unsurprising that Russia was privately heavily opposed to the way the defence reform was conducted. Yet no objections were raised to voice its discontent with the HiRep's approach in the UNSC that year. Nevertheless, there were frequent statements about the need to swiftly draw down the OHR. Additionally, in the first meeting of 2005, Russia also mentioned the "array of sanctions implemented by the High Representative" as something undesirable (UNSC, 2005a).

The subsequent High Representative, Christian Schwartz-Schilling (2006–2007), was consistently praised by the Russian delegation. This is unsurprising as Schwartz-Schilling avoided using the Bonn Powers. However, Moscow consistently referred to its preference for the avoidance of utilising the Bonn Powers altogether and a quick transfer of the OHR to the EU's Mission (UNSC, 2007). Indeed, it was during a 2006 meeting of the PIC Steering Board that it was decided the OHR should be closed. To accomplish this the Steering Board adopted the so-called 5+2 Agenda in 2008. The 5+2 Agenda called for the resolution of several outstanding legal and governance issues. It also conditioned the closure of the OHR on a positive assessment by the PIC Steering Board that there is full compliance with the Dayton Agreement and greater legal alignment with the EU (OHR, 2015a).

From 2007 to the start of 2009, Miroslav Lajčák served as the HiRep. For most of his incumbency, Russian representatives were largely content with the work of the OHR. However, it was during 2008, coinciding with Putin's interim prime ministerial term (between his second and third presidential incumbency), that the Russian representatives' statements on the OHR gradually turned negative. This co-occurred with a more assertive Russian foreign policy globally. Vitaly Churkin's statement during the first UNSC meeting on BiH in 2008 was largely focused on the need to wind down the OHR, warning other PIC members that they should not add additional preconditions for this development to take place. It was during the meeting discussing Lajčák's final report as the High Representative, that the Russian representative's sentiments about the OHR took a negative turn (UNSC, 2008). This trend has lasted to the present day. During this statement, Mr. Churkin expressed that the most recent PIC Steering Board report did not reflect reality and hindered the "implementation of the programme set by the Steering Board calling for transitioning from the Office of the High Representative to the Mission of the European Union Special Representative". The statement also denounced the imposition of "some kind of formula or prescription to improve the Dayton Agreement, especially using the so-called Bonn power" (Ibid).

By this point, Moscow had come to terms with the idea that Western powers would not be as considerate of Russia's interests nor receptive to its requests as was initially hoped with the fall of the USSR. While the Kremlin initially believed that conformity and even promotion of the Western-dominated international system would secure a favourable position for Russia within said system, by the late 2000s, it was clear that these aims would not be realised and a new foreign policy strategy was needed ([Kocho-Williams, 2013](#)). In addition to Moscow's unsuccessful attempt to link its war in Chechnya with George W. Bush's narrative of the Global War on Terror, the Kremlin perceived the West as undermining it throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s through so-called 'colour revolutions'. These were pro-Western social and political movements in countries such as Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, which compromised Russian interests in its near abroad or former sphere of influence ([Stent, 2014](#)). Similar protests took place in Russia between 2011 and 2013, which the Kremlin blamed on Western agents.

In the context of the perceived decline of Russia's grip on power, preventing former Soviet states and countries in Russia's desired sphere of influence (particularly in Eastern Europe) from joining NATO became a policy priority. Indeed, Georgia's pursuit of NATO membership was a contributing factor to Russia's decision to go to war in 2008, and its invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014 came amidst Ukraine's greater rapprochement with the bloc ([Donaldson and Nadkarni, 2019](#)). Russia claimed its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was induced by a constitutional commitment to join NATO and the EU, and it is likely that pro-democratic and liberal shifts in the country concern an increasingly authoritarian Putin seeking to expand Russia's power abroad ([Lewis, 2020](#); [Person and McFaul, 2022](#)). Russia's repeated condemnation of the HiRep's efforts over the years to facilitate BiH's greater alignment with NATO as a stepping stone to membership, for which it applied in 2016 ([European Commission, 2023](#)), further elucidates the reasons for Russia's negative turn against the Dayton peace process and its institutions from 2008. The result of these events was an intensification of Russia's condemnation of the OHR.

The subsequent High Representative, Valentin Inzko (2009–2021), refrained from using the Bonn Powers until his last few days of a 12-year mandate, when he passed his only executive decision criminalising the denial of genocide in [BiH](#). Yet despite his relative inactivity, he was subjected to an intensified criticism by Russian representatives at the UNSC, indicating the degree of influence these geopolitical developments had on Russia's engagement with the official peace process in BiH.

Russian representatives took issue with Inzko's reports, which often apportioned Republika Srpska (RS) blame for hindering the implementation of the peace process. In 2015, Russia first used the term "illegal" to describe the OHR's criticism of the RS (UNSC, 2015a). During this period, the Russian representative called upon the UNSC to consider parallel reports on the situation in BiH published by the RS. Moscow also urged the Council to consider challenges to the Dayton Accords' implementation caused by the Federal government and the rise of Islamism in the other entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. An additional point of contention was the role the OHR played in fostering the Euro-Atlantic path of BiH. In 2008 Moscow had agreed to the 5+2 Agenda for closure of the OHR, which would have put BiH on the path to becoming a "[peaceful, viable state irreversibly on course for European integration](#)", however this orientation of the OHR became increasingly controversial in 2010s. During Inzko's tenure as the HiRep, Moscow vehemently denounced the OHR as attempting to hijack the BiH peace process to further the "Euro-Atlantic agenda" and to extend the mandate of the OHR indefinitely. The OHR was often portrayed as a stooge of Western states, rather than a servant of the international community.

Matters continued to worsen with the appointment of Christian Schmidt as the High Representative in August 2021, half a year before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Christian Schmidt was appointed by the PIC Steering Board, an appointment with which Russia, as a member of the Board, disagreed. This was the first time in the history of the institution that one of the Steering Board members was "outvoted" in the selection of the HiRep, at least publicly. The Steering Board always acted with a seeming consensus when it came to appointments. Moscow therefore maintained that the appointment of a new HiRep (or a non-renewal of the position) would need to be brought before the UNSC for approval. In that forum, both Russia and China could veto any appointment. Instead, Schmidt assumed his role without an active approval of the UNSC, a move which both Russia and China denounced. Both states refused to acknowledge Schmidt's position and to this day consider the position of the High Representative vacant.

On 22 July 2021, Russia and China presented a draft UNSC resolution which proposed to extend a limited mandate of the OHR by one year with the view of it being shut down at the end of the term (UNSC, 2021a). The draft resolution failed to get a single vote beyond the two proposing states. When presenting the document to the UNSC, the Russian representative noted that the High Representative had "gradually acquired a complex web of powers and competences, including under the Bonn Powers, and has basically become a kind of unilateral czar and is allowed to "render justice" with impunity...[and] is clinging to the role of tutelary authority that is inappropriate in all respects and continues to influence the process of the peace settlement, now in a negative way" (UNSC, 2021c). Since then, the Russian representative has consistently highlighted the dangers Moscow believes are associated with the continued presence of the OHR, especially "[a]ttempts to invoke the so-called Bonn Powers to annul unwanted domestic laws", which Russia argues "are unlawful and legally null and void" as they overstep Bosnia's sovereignty, especially given that, in Moscow's view, the post of High Representative remains open (UNSC, 2022a).

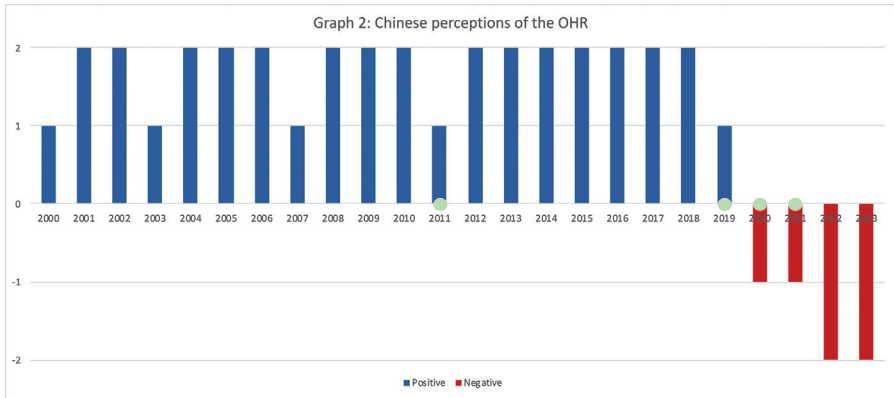
The criticism grew louder as the new HiRep started using his Bonn Powers again, passing 19 [decisions in 2022 and 2023](#). In 2023, Vasily Nebenzya, the Russian representative, lambasted the West for exploiting the OHR and the Dayton Peace Agreement, claiming that "[e]xternal forces" were working "through the Office of the High Representative and a number of international presences in Sarajevo". The speech came after Schmidt's decision to amend the Constitution of FBiH to push for government formation in the entity. Moscow argued that the OHR is becoming "directly involved in the systemic internal political crisis in the country... evok[ing] some of the worst colonial traditions by interfering in the Constitution of [...] the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina" (UNSC, 2023a).

Alongside these developments, Russia reneged on its funding and functional obligations for the OHR and PIC in 2022, coinciding with its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Just 20 days before Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin and Xi Jinping released a joint statement which criticised the international community for intervening in the internal affairs of states under the pretence of democracy and human rights promotion and protection ([President of Russia, 2022](#)). These sentiments were echoed in Russia's narrative about the OHR and PIC, as an international institution with legislative and enforcement powers in a sovereign state. This indicates a growing preoccupation with international mandates in states under the name of protecting and promoting peace.

China and the OHR

A quick overview of Chinese statements on the OHR shows that Beijing remained positively predisposed towards the institution until 2020. This contrasts with the Russian position, which turned towards negative sentiments as early as 2008. The period before 2020 includes two neutral statements in 2011 and 2019. The November 2019 statement was the first in which the Chinese delegation expressed discontent with the HiRep overstepping his mandate (UNSC, 2019b). Since the COVID-19 pandemic all Chinese UNSC meeting statements regarding the OHR's activities have been negative.

Graph 2: Chinese perceptions of the OHR



For two decades (2000–2019), Chinese representatives consistently expressed support for the High Representative in the UNSC debates. They particularly praised the OHR's effectiveness in implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement and the progress made in areas of police and judicial reform. Reforms in these sectors are crucial for the stability of the country, which China needed so its growing investments in the region would remain secure.

Despite the overall positivity towards the OHR actions in the first two decades of the 21st century, Chinese statements often indicated a preference towards the non-imposition of decisions, whether that be through UNSC resolutions invoking Chapter VII of the UN Charter or the OHR's Bonn Powers. However, individual instances of the use of Bonn powers were never specifically criticised by Beijing. This could indicate that BiH was not a high priority for China and that Beijing did not follow developments in the country in detail, perhaps indicated by China's shorter and more generic statements at the UNSC compared to Russia's. However, the Bonn powers are some of the most extensive executive powers conferred on any international body in the post-Cold War era, and China would have been aware of their significance for norms of sovereignty and non-intervention. The lack of engagement when the High Representatives were passing laws or dismissing officials, therefore, more likely indicates that while China was discursively supporting the norms of non-intervention and sovereignty, it was primarily interested in stability in BiH (cf. Vangeli, 2024); the OHR was seen as a vehicle facilitating this stability.

China made its first relatively negative statement about international missions in BiH in November 2020. While representative Geng Shuang did not call out the OHR for any specific issues, he did warn "senior representatives" to "carry out their work strictly in accordance with their mandates, [and] maintain an objective and neutral stance" (UNSC, 2020). In 2021, after Christian Schmidt was appointed as the HiRep without the consent of Russia on the PIC Steering Board, and Russia insisted that the UNSC needed to approve all appointments, China joined the criticism of the institution. Chinese statements from 2021 onwards express the belief that the OHR's Bonn Powers are "a special arrangement for a specific period", indicating that this period had now ended. In June 2021, China called for the drawing down of the OHR (UNSC, 2021b); this was the first time the Chinese delegation made such a request. The rationale behind this stance was that Schmidt had been appointed to the office in an unorthodox manner, with China claiming that the UNSC approval of every new HiRep had been written into the Dayton Peace Agreement. In May 2022 Beijing went as far as stating that "it is inappropriate for him to brief the Council in the capacity as High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina" (UNSC, 2022a).

In addition to questioning the legality of Christian Schmidt's appointment, China also asserted that the OHR was not an impartial force. Indeed, in the same statement in 2022, Mr. Dai Bing, the Chinese representative, stated that "[e]xternal forces choosing sides", referring to the High Representative, "will not help to [...] resolve the disagreements among ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Ibid).

Previously Beijing highlighted that “the Parliament of the Republika Srpska adopted a resolution calling for the immediate closure of the Office of the High Representative” (UNSC, 2021b). Given the RS’s position, the Chinese delegation stated that “[t]he international community should reassess the role and the mandate of the High Representative in order to ensure that the Office adapts to the current reality and the needs of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Ibid).

In recent years, China has become more economically active in BiH, primarily investing in the RS. China’s newfound assertiveness in the UNSC could therefore be linked to its economic activity and competition with the West, signalling support for authorities receptive to its investments. However, BiH is a relatively minor market for Beijing, making it more likely that the change in Chinese discourse is linked to procedural issues with Christian Schmidt’s appointment and with Beijing’s wish to support its ally Russia. Schmidt’s appointment almost perfectly coincided with increasing tensions around Ukraine and the subsequent Russian invasion. This has meant that China could show discursive support for following procedural rules and norms of non-intervention while simultaneously supporting its ally. It could do so in a region of smaller strategic significance for Beijing. However, it is important to note that Chinese negative discourse is motivated by different factors than that of Russia. China remains primarily interested in stability of the region. Keeping this distinction between China and Russia at the forefront could allow the West to engage China productively in seeking solutions for the Bosnian peace process.

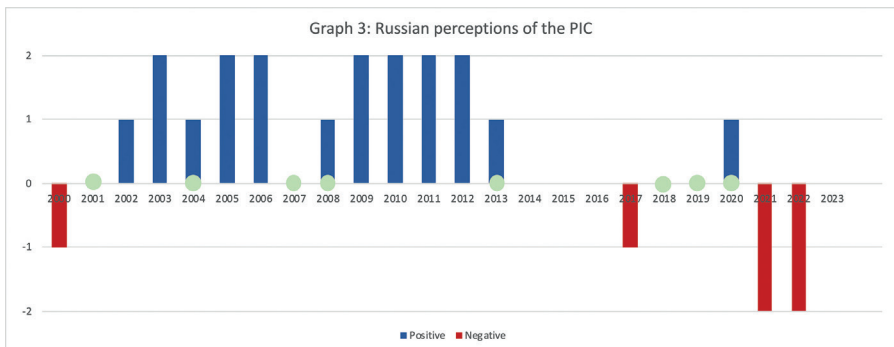
Discursive Trends on the PIC

The discursive trends towards the PIC and PIC Steering Board follow a similar trajectory to those towards the OHR. However, it is more difficult to analyse these systematically, particularly in the case of China. Whereas Russia has more commonly mentioned PIC during UNSC meetings regarding BiH, China rarely mentions the OHR oversight body in its statements. This is likely because Russia acted as a member of PIC Steering Board, and was therefore privy to its functioning, whereas China is not. Besides overall positive statements in meetings in 2001, 2008, 2012, and a neutral one in 2009, China did not engage with the institution. Beijing reserved most statements for the institution whose reports it was commenting on, the OHR.

Graph 3, which follows Russian statements about PIC in the UNSC, shows that since 2000, and until around 2013, Russia was generally positive about the work of PIC and its Steering Board. Between 2014 and 2017, PIC was not mentioned by Russia, followed by a negative trend in the most recent years. The disapproval of PIC started later than that of the OHR, signalling that until recently Russia saw the institution as playing an important oversight role in the Bosnian peace process.

Russia is a member of the PIC Steering Board, meaning that it, alongside mainly Western states and Turkey, regularly met and advised the HiRep. From 2013, Russia has either not mentioned PIC or has made negative or neutral statements about it at UNSC debates. During this period Russia also started openly disagreeing with PIC Steering Board communiqués and other statements prepared by the group. The tensions escalated from 2019 onwards, and since then Russia was recorded to have officially disagreed with nearly all PIC Steering Board communiqués and statements (OHR, 2015d). These trends within Russian UNSC meeting statements about PIC and disagreement with PIC communiqués and statements coincided with Russia’s annexation of Crimea and increasing tensions in Ukraine. While discussions in the PIC Steering Board are confidential, it became an open secret in Sarajevo that over the last five years, Russia was an outcast in the oversight body, a development which would neatly explain the negative turn towards the institution in the UNSC. This negative sentiment became even more pronounced after it was outvoted on the appointment of the new HiRep in 2021.

Graph 3: Russia's discursive trends: PIC



International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, the Court, the Tribunal) was established by the UN Security Council to address war crimes that occurred during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. It was set up in 1993 after reports of atrocities — such as murder, torture, sexual abuse, enslavement, destruction of property, and injury — surfaced in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Its aim was to bring justice and lasting peace to the former Yugoslavia as well as act as a deterrent for future crimes. Since 2003, the Court has also worked with national-level judiciaries in the former Yugoslavia to support their efforts in gaining justice for those affected by the conflict. The ICTY's mandate lasted until 2017.

ICTY was a ground-breaking institution as it was the first criminal tribunal established by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and it was the first international war crimes tribunal since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials. It is one of the few examples of courts where high-level officials were prosecuted for the most extreme crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The ICTY has set a template for other settings undergoing transitional justice processes and is often considered as a precursor to the permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) ([ICTY, 2017](#); [Sokolović, 2022](#)).

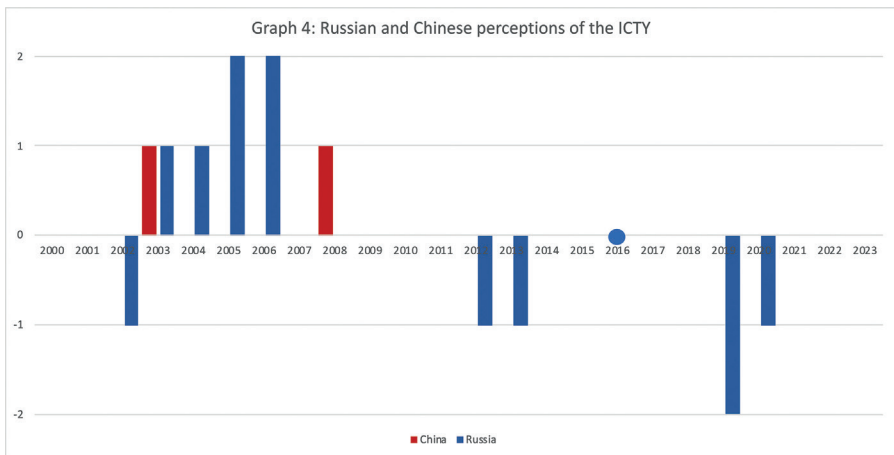
During its lifetime, the ICTY charged over 160 people with crimes committed between 1991 and 2001. The indictees came from multiple ethnic groups in BiH, Serbia, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Kosovo. They included heads of state, prime ministers, interior ministers, chiefs-of-staff of the armed forces, and numerous other senior and mid-ranking political, military, and law enforcement officials. BiH was the key focus of the ICTY. As Serbs were the aggressors in the conflict, the numbers of Bosnian Serbs indicted by the ICTY was higher than indictees from other ethnic groups. However, the higher numbers also created the discourse that the ICTY, similar to the OHR, had an anti-Serb bias (Obradović-Wochnik 2013). BiH was also specific in another respect: with heavy international presence in the country, cooperation with the Court did not entirely rely on the goodwill of local authorities. In fact, the multiple international organisations present in the country often cooperated in facilitating bringing suspected perpetrators to the court, including through conditionality and enforcement actions.

The HiRep Ashdown became known for heavily utilising his Bonn Powers to sanction local politicians over obstruction of prosecution of war criminals (see above), with Stabilisation Force (SFOR) mission apprehending indictees (see below). The discussion of the ICTY is therefore heavily enmeshed with that on other institutions.

Discursive trends on the ICTY

Somehow surprisingly, Russia and China rarely mentioned the ICTY during post-2000 UNSC meetings about BiH, despite its controversial nature. The ICTY was a rare example of a court where senior officials were prosecuted for war crimes. Both Russian and Chinese leaders have denounced such international interventions, especially under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In its work on the BiH, the ICTY was also disproportionately indicting Bosnian Serbs, allies of Russia, making the virtual silence in the early years somewhat unexpected.

Graph 4: Russian and Chinese perceptions of the ICTY



Until 2006, when Russian representatives mentioned the ICTY, their statements were largely positive. Russian officials argued that compliance with the ICTY was of utmost importance to the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement (UNSC, 2004). The Russian delegation also praised the ICTY's transference of cases "to the emerging Bosnian court as a major element of the successful implementation of the strategy to fulfil the Tribunal's mandate" (UNSC, 2003). During this era, Russia raised some concerns, particularly in relation to the use of enforcement measures to induce cooperation with the Court. From 2005, Russian representatives called for the High Representative to use restraint when imposing sanctions on ICTY indictees. In these statements, the Russian delegations supported full cooperation with the ICTY, but asked that political and diplomatic mechanisms be used to incentivise cooperation, rather than the punitive use of the Bonn Powers (UNSC, 2005a; UNSC, 2005b; UNSC, 2006a; UNSC, 2006b). However, these statements were primarily a discursive signalling of support for the allied Serbs, with Russia maintaining a generally positive outlook towards the ICTY. Until 2006, Russia never practically indicated the withdrawal of support for the Tribunal or criticised it directly in its UNSC statements.

Much like with the sentiment towards the OHR, Russian sentiment towards the ICTY also turned around 2008. However, this was less obvious in the UNSC records as Moscow made no statements on the ICTY between the start of 2007 and end of 2011, having made positive statements between 2003 and 2006. After 2012, the Russian delegation began to openly criticise the Tribunal's perceived biased approach to prosecution. The more assertive approach to the ICTY coincides with Putin's re-election in 2012. Negative statements in 2012, 2013, and 2019 were all attributed to the perception that the ICTY was only dealing with allegations against Serbs, with Russian officials claiming that individuals of all ethnic backgrounds present in BiH perpetrated crimes and should all, therefore, be tried by the Tribunal (UNSC, 2012b; UNSC, 2013a; UNSC, 2019b). This criticism also extended to the Bosnian judicial system; and both the national and international judicial systems were denounced as "clearly biased" in 2013 (UNSC, 2013a). In 2015 Russia used its veto on a UNSC draft resolution which asserted that reconciliation in BiH is preconditioned on the acceptance that the Srebrenica massacre was a "genocide" (Sokolović, 2022). As the denial of genocide in the RS intensified, Russia increasingly showed its support for Republika Srpska leadership in matters of criminal justice. The ICTY became used as an example of a biased institution, even after the Court ceased operating in 2017.

In 2019, the Russian representative praised the internal commissions established by the RS Government, tasked with investigating "crimes against all peoples in the Srebrenica region and against Serbs in Sarajevo in 1991-1995" (UNSC, 2019b). While the HiRep and the Western governments saw the establishment of said commission as part of the genocide denial tactics by the RS, Moscow condemned the High Representative for "demoniz[ing]" these commissions, accusing the ICTY and International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals of shortcomings that necessitated the formation of these commissions (Ibid). The greater emphasis on the ICTY's bias against Bosnian Serbs, and condemnation of this by Russian representatives, came at a time when ties between Putin and the leader of the Serbian entity, Milorad Dodik, were strengthening. Since around 2016, Russia has been involved in training and equipping Republika Srpska's police force. Since then, Russian veteran and orthodox societies, as well as other actors such as the Night Wolves and Wagner Group, have been active in the entity in an attempt to boost Russian influence and strengthen Dodik's image, culminating in Dodik's presentation of a medal of honour to Putin in 2023 (Gueudet, 2023; Kico, Kapetanović, and Šušnica 2022; Samorukov 2023).

Unlike Russia, which intensified its negative discourse on the ICTY in recent years, China only mentioned the Tribunal twice in the UNSC debates, both times in the mid 2000s and in both cases issuing words of support for the work of the Tribunal. The first statement came in 2003, when the Chinese representative expressed support for the ICTY's work and hoped for a swift "achievement of justice" and the "implementation of the Tribunal's completion strategy" (UNSC, 2003). The second mention was in 2008, when the Chinese representative praised the institutions that have worked towards promoting stability in BiH, one of which was the ICTY, which they associated with movement towards integration with the European Union, a development hoped for by China (UNSC, 2008). Although it is difficult to interpret the motivation behind these statements, as statements are scarce and relatively unspecific, their general orientation comports with our analysis in the OHR section above. China seems to be prioritising stability in the country over all other matters. At the time, transitional justice was seen as part of that path toward stability. However, as China has not mentioned the Court or the transitional justice mechanisms since 2008, we cannot assess its orientation on the role of the ICTY or transitional justice more recently.

United Nations Mission in Bosnia Herzegovina (UNMIBH)

The United Nations Mission in Bosnia Herzegovina (UNMIBH) was established upon the signing of the Dayton Agreement on 14 December 1995. It comprised two components, the UN International Police Task Force (UN-IPTF) and the UN civilian office in BiH. Its mandate was completed, and the Mission came to an end on 31 December 2002.

Discursive trends on the UN civilian office

The civilian components of UNMIBH's mandate comprised the delivery of humanitarian relief, facilitating the return of refugees, demining, protecting, and promoting human rights, monitoring and facilitating free and fair elections, and reconstructing the economy and infrastructure destroyed during the war. Alongside UNMIBH's hand in restructuring and monitoring the Bosnian police force (a task entrusted to the UN-IPTF) one of the most crucial tasks was its evaluation and reform of the judicial system in BiH, which was undertaken alongside the OSCE ([UNMIBH, 2003](#)). Here we provide an overview of the sentiments on the broader UNMIBH mission, with the specifics of the policing component analysed in the next part.

The civilian component of UNMIBH was uncontroversial for Russia and China, which in the late 1990s and early 2000s largely backed multilateral initiatives in comparison to those led by singular states or blocs. This is particularly true for the organisations in which they were involved, such as the UN. The civilian component of UNMIBH also had relatively limited powers, mostly supporting and facilitating the work of local institutions. This is unlike the OHR or the UN-IPTF, both of which had enforcement powers. For the duration of its mandate, UNMIBH was mentioned quite rarely, but mostly with positive sentiments.

Russian delegations made two positive statements about UNMIBH at UNSC meetings regarding BiH during its mandate. While the first statement was made outside of the period under scrutiny, in 1998, the Russian representative's description of the UNMIBH as "[a]n extremely important area of international assistance" is salient (UNSC, 1998). Russia was a sponsor of the draft resolution put to a vote in that same meeting, which sought to extend the UNMIBH's mandate (alongside Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and the UN International Police Task Force (IPTF)); the resolution was passed (*Ibid*). Russia made another positive statement about UNMIBH in 2002 praising the work of the mission in seamlessly transitioning its mandate to the European Union Mission in BiH (UNSC, 2002).

Similarly to Russia, the Chinese delegation infrequently mentioned UNMIBH at UNSC meetings regarding BiH. Although, when it did, it conveyed positive sentiments. The first was in 2001, expressing support for the UNMIBH's restructuring of BiH's law enforcement bodies (UNSC, 2001b). The second was in 2002, when the Chinese delegation also praised its work towards police reform and training as well as judicial reform and called for its orderly departure (UNSC, 2002b).

Discursive trends on the UN International Police Task Force (UN-IPTF) and its successor

Annex 11 of the Dayton Peace Agreement provided for the establishment of an International Police Task Force (UN-IPTF) in BiH as a UN civilian police operation. The mandate of UN-IPTF lapsed at the end of 2002, at the same time as that of the UNMIBH. To continue supporting policing reforms, the European Union decided to provide a follow-on mission to the UN-IPTF, known as the EU Police Mission (EUPM). The EUPM, launched 1 January 2003, became the first task of the new European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). It concluded its mandate on 30 June 2012.

The main task of the UN-IPTF was to establish a democratic police force in BiH, with a focus on promoting the protection of human rights within the police. This was an important task as the police forces, which remained at the entity level post-Dayton, were involved in human rights abuses during the war. This task was accompanied by advising governing authorities on how to establish effective civilian law enforcement; generally monitoring and inspecting law enforcement activities and infrastructure; advising, assisting, and training police personnel and forces; facilitating the law enforcement activities of the signatories of the Dayton Agreement; and assessing threats to law and order and advising law enforcement agencies regarding these (UNMIBH, 2003). Included within this process were IPTF monitors who documented and investigated abuses of power and justice within the police force. These monitors played a key role in identifying and removing from the force officers who had committed crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, and other human rights atrocities (HRW, 1998). UN-IPTF therefore had executive powers in its domain, something that could be potentially controversial to Russia and China and their discourse of non-intervention and sovereignty.

During the short mandate of the UN-IPTF, most of which occurred prior to the period under scrutiny in this report, both Russia and China expressed positive sentiments about the institution. In 1996, all relevant UNSC meeting records showed that Russia and China supported the institution and its work. The 1997 meeting, which also included a report by the HiRep, was dominated by discussion of a report from the UN-IPTF. Following the discussion, the UNSC released a joint statement supporting the work of the UN-IPTF and condemning all attempts to obstruct its mission ([UNSC 1997](#)). In 1998, a joint statement of UNSC members relayed that the UN-IPTF was "an extremely important area of international assistance" (UNSC, 1998). Statements by the Chinese representative in 2001 and 2002 praise the work of the UN-IPTF especially towards police reform (UNSC 2001b; 2002b). Neither Russia nor China criticised the executive nature of the UN-IPTF, indicating that they were comfortable with international missions taking a stronger role in vetting and reforming the police after war.

The follow-on mission, EUPM, was a non-executive, unarmed police force tasked with training and professionalising a multi-ethnic Bosnian police force and developing the judicial system, especially capacity-building for prosecution. Throughout the EUPM's existence, Russian and Chinese delegations rarely mentioned the institution at UNSC meetings on BiH. The Russian representative, Gatilov, only once mentioned the EUPM, welcoming its work as its mandate began in October 2003 (UNSC, 2003). This differs from the other Security Council members, who frequently mentioned and praised the work of the EUPM throughout its mandate.

Military Institutions of the Dayton Peace Process

Overview

Unlike with the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement, the international support for the implementation of military provisions was designed to run under a single command structure. Annex 1A of the Dayton Peace Accords and UN Security Council Resolution 1031 (15 December 1995) authorised NATO to establish a multinational military Implementation Force (IFOR). This was to relieve the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), which operated in BiH during the war. Because of the command failures of the UN peacekeeping mission during the war, which contributed to the inability of UN peacekeepers to prevent the genocide in Srebrenica, the parties requested that the post-settlement operation be run under a NATO command structure. But IFOR was a multilateral peacekeeping force which included non-NATO contributors, including Russia. The mandate of IFOR lasted one year and its primary role was to monitor and observe ceasefire provisions and ensure the withdrawal of armed forces behind a zone of separation. IFOR's role was a classic peacekeeping one: monitoring and keeping the warring parties apart, with only the subsequent missions acquiring institution-building tasks.

At the end of 1996, IFOR was replaced with a new NATO-led mission, the Stabilisation Force (SFOR), also deriving authority from a UNSC Chapter VII resolution. SFOR, which also included non-NATO members, including Russia, remained in operation until end of 2004. SFOR's mandate was specifically designed for the post-conflict phase, namely to "deter hostilities and stabilise the peace" ([SFOR, 2003](#)). Its objective was to ensure compliance with the Dayton Accords and support the establishment of key civil institutions and structures. The Dayton Peace Agreement highlights the areas to which SFOR was to contribute, namely: the provision of a secure and safe environment; to set up a unified and democratic BiH; to recover the economy; and foment conditions for the safe return of refugees and displaced persons ([Ibid](#)). SFOR was also engaged in ensuring compliance of local authorities with the ICTY, often cooperating with the Tribunal and the OHR in actions intended to bring suspected war criminals to justice. As a Chapter VII mission, it had executive capabilities and could arrest individuals.

In 2004, following NATO's decision to hand over its peacekeeping mission, the EU launched its own operation. The EU mission (EUFOR, EUFOR-ALTHEA) is authorised by the UNSC under Chapter VII and is carried out with recourse to NATO assets and capabilities, on the basis agreed with NATO (the so-called Berlin Plus arrangement) (EUFOR, 2023). The mission is in existence today but has over the years changed its size and focus substantially.

EUFOR has two components: an executive one and a non-executive one. The executive mandate is given to the mission by the UNSC, and this was the mandate that was taken over from SFOR. As part of executive tasks, the mission is supposed to support the BiH authorities in maintaining a safe and secure environment as specified under the Dayton Accords. The non-executive mandate is a broader one, supporting the training and restructuring of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AF BiH) in their progression towards NATO standards. This mandate became particularly important following the 2005 Defence Reform in BiH, which merged the armed forces of the two entities under one chain of command. In 2006 BiH joined the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, and in 2010 the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The improving security situation in BiH meant that in 2007, EUFOR reduced troop levels from around 7,000 in 2004 to 1,100 in 2007. However, the increasing destabilisation of the country in recent years meant the activation of the EUFOR Intermediate Reserve Force in 2022, and EUFOR troop levels were again increased to 1,600. They are now mainly focused on "assisting the Government of BiH in maintaining a safe and secure environment as well as combined training alongside the AF BiH" (Ibid).

Like its predecessors IFOR and SFOR, EUFOR's mandate needs to be renewed annually by the UNSC, where both China and Russia could exercise their veto power. In the analysis below, we track how their discourse on the military support for the implementation of the Dayton Agreement has changed over the years, especially as all three missions are NATO or EU mandated, and as the recent two worked towards the Euro-Atlantic integration process.

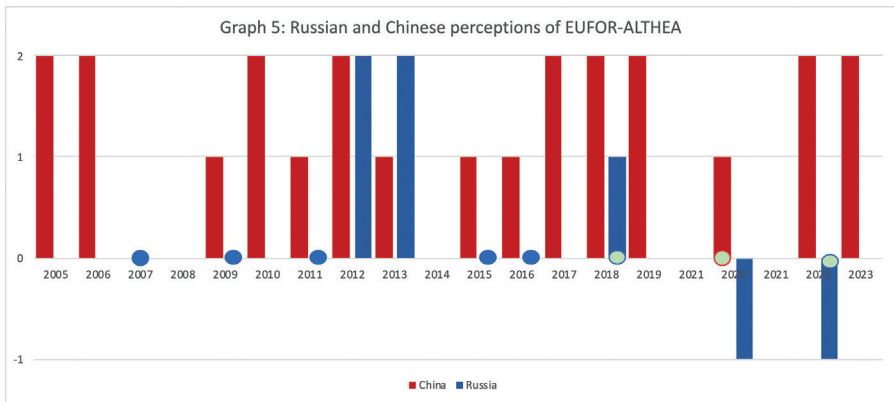
IFOR and SFOR

While all the comments about IFOR, and some about SFOR, were made before the timeframe under scrutiny in this report, it is important to note that with regards to the former, both Russia and China expressed support for the institution at two UNSC meetings in a joint statement of the UNSC. The Council expressed satisfaction with IFOR's ability to ensure compliance with the military aspects of the Dayton Agreement. Regarding SFOR, in 1998 the Chinese representative reiterated "China's reservations about the invocation of Chapter VII of the Charter and the authorization of the use of force contained in the draft resolution" and urged that "the Stabilization Force (SFOR) must not misuse force" (UNSC, 1998). After 2000, the Russian and Chinese delegations make very little mention of SFOR. Russia's first comment, which was neutral and factual, occurred in 2000. Representative Gatilov expressed that stability in the country still frequently required the input of SFOR and the OHR. A negative statement about SFOR was made in 2002, when Moscow condemned SFOR's use of coercion to bring indictees to the ICTY. However, the renewal of the mission was never questioned, showing an overall support for the activities of SFOR. Further neutral statements were made by Russian and Chinese delegations in 2004, which referred to SFOR's replacement by the European Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Operation Althea (EUFOR-ALTHEA).

EUFOR-ALTHEA

On the whole, mention of EUFOR-ALTHEA at UNSC meetings about BiH have been largely positive, with the mission raising far less controversy than its civilian counterparts. Throughout its near 20-year mandate, EUFOR has been a major topic of debate by UNSC members. However, conversely to the debates on the civilian presence, where Moscow representatives were much more vocal than the Beijing ones, the EU military mission was more often discussed by China. Given that the number of statements by Russia is smaller, we mapped Chinese and Russian sentiments in a single chart (Graph 5). The dots on the timeline indicate when Russian representatives made neutral, factual statements.

Graph 5: Chinese and Russian perceptions of EUFOR-ALTHEA



Russia and EUFOR

Russian statements on EUFOR-ALTHEA follow a similar discursive trend to those towards the PIC, turning negative only in more recent years. However, where they differ is that Russia was far less vocal on the military mission in UNSC debates, always prioritising the civilian elements of peace implementation. The civilian component also seems to be a large reason the sentiment has turned.

Until 2012, Russia had made three neutral, factual statements about EUFOR-ALTHEA. The first (2007) noted the reduction in EUFOR's troops present in BiH. The second and third (2009 and 2011) commented on the fact that there were discrepancies between the High Representative's report and that of EUFOR's. In 2009, Russia did not go into detail on its assessment of EUFOR but used the EU mission report to try to discredit that of the HiRep, who at the time was being heavily criticised by Moscow. This could indicate a generally positive orientation towards the EU mission, as its views on the security situation in the country aligned more with the EUFOR's assessments than the HiRep's.

Russian statements made in 2012 and 2013 confirm our analysis that EUFOR was being assessed alongside the OHR, with Russia predominantly thinking about the closure of the latter when speaking about the EU mission. In 2012 and 2013, Russia made four positive statements about EUFOR-ALTHEA. The Russian delegation supported the strengthening of the EU military operation in BiH and the extension of its mandate (UNSC, 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b). However, during these meetings, the Russian representative made clear that Russia saw the bolstering of the EU mission and the EU military operation as a “step towards winding down the Office of the High Representative”, in addition to speaking vocally about the need for a clearer “division of the responsibilities of the High Representative and the EU’s Special Representative” with the view of the latter taking on more of the obligations (UNSC, 2012b). Moscow hoped that the EU Special Representative, a civilian deployment by the European Union, would take over the remaining responsibilities of the HiRep, but without any enforcement capabilities (i.e., the Bonn Powers). As previously mentioned, this, by Russian estimations, would be a positive development.

In 2013, the Russian representatives expressed continued support for EUFOR “ensuring security in Bosnia and Herzegovina and training personnel of the national Ministry of Defence and armed forces” (UNSC, 2013a), supporting the extension of its mandate in November 2013 (UNSC, 2013b). While the UNSC meeting notes relevant to the vote on UNSC resolution 2183 do not mention EUFOR-ALTHEA, Russia abstained from the vote extending its mandate in November 2014, due to the perceived exploitation of Chapter VII of the UN Charter to progress EU and NATO integration (UNSC, 2014a; 2014b). The extent to which the abstention was linked to EUFOR’s potential exploitation of Chapter VII in this regard or the OHR’s activities is difficult to ascertain without a detailed Russian explanation at the time.

Between 2014 and 2018, the Russian delegation only made factual statements about EUFOR-ALTHEA or did not mention it at all. Russian representatives mentioned EUFOR-ALTHEA in 2015, 2016, and 2018 at the UNSC. In 2018, the Russian representative made a particular note to express support for the extension of EUFOR-ALTHEA's mandate. However, while this was coded as a positive attitude towards the institution, the context in which the statement was made indicates that the representative was motivated more by the desire to express veiled gratitude to the sponsors of the draft resolution for considering Russia's "principled considerations, if only at the very last moment" (UNSC, 2018b). Furthermore, in the same statement, the Russian representative denounced "the working methods that the penholders for the draft resolution chose [...] the dangerous path of introducing a highly politicized document [...] supporting the non-consensus-based Euro-Atlantic aspirations of a number of Bosnian forces" (Ibid). After this, Russia made no mention of the EU mission in UNSC debates until 2022.

However, as reported in the UN Security Council Report (2023), from 2021, the renewal of the EUFOR mission became highly politicised. Russia threatened to veto the Council's renewal of EUFOR-ALTHEA's authorisation, if the HiRep was allowed to brief the UNSC. This was after Christian Schmidt was appointed the HiRep without Russia approval. As a compromise, the meeting that renewed EUFOR's mandate did not feature a briefing by the HiRep. The resolution also did not include mention of the HiRep and was solely focused on EUFOR-ALTHEA. After the vote, several other members expressed regret that the resolution was circumscribed, but Russia described "support for EUFOR ALTHEA's mandate renewal as the only "common denominator" among Council members on the issue of BiH" (Ibid).

In 2022, after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian delegation for the first time expressed concern with EUFOR-ALTHEA after receiving the HiRep report. This came two months after the EUFOR military contingent in BiH was doubled and its armed personnel started patrolling urban areas again. The Russian representative claimed that this was "creating an atmosphere of danger and fear" (UNSC, 2022a). These negative sentiments continued into 2023. While the mission is now renewed to November 2024, its continued existence remains fragile.

China and EUFOR

China often mentioned EUFOR-ALTHEA at UNSC meetings regarding BiH; the statements were always to express positive sentiments about the EU mission and its contributions to the stability in BiH. China also never directly joined Russia in its recent threats to veto the resolutions extending the mission. We see this as a possible signal of China favouring stability of BiH over the legal issues involving the HiRep's appointment, a position which sets it apart from Russia.

In 2005, statements were made in support of the "smooth handover from the Stabilization Force (SFOR) to the European Force (EUFOR)" (UNSC, 2005a). Just under a year later, the Chinese representative praised "the EU military mission (EUFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina" for contributing "to the country's political progress" (UNSC, 2006a). After two years without mentioning EUFOR-ALTHEA, the Chinese delegation stated that "[t]he European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina [...] is an important force in guaranteeing local security" (UNSC, 2009). In 2010, it praised "the positive role played by the European Union in the framework of the Dayton Peace Agreement and supports [...] the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR)" especially regarding "the capacity-building of the Bosnia and Herzegovina armed forces [...] to assume responsibility for maintaining its own State sovereignty, security and stability" (UNSC, 2010). Two similar statements were made in 2012, and others in 2013, 2015, and 2016 (UNSC, 2012a; 2012b; 2013b; 2015b; 2016).

The tone of Chinese statements did not change much during the time that Russia intensified its negative discourse. In 2017 the Chinese delegation expressed "hope that the European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to work with the relevant parties to play a positive role in maintaining security and stability in the country" (UNSC, 2017a). Similar statements were made later that year, and in 2018, 2019, 2022, 2023 (UNSC, 2017b; 2018a; 2019a; 2019b; 2022b; 2023a). In 2022, the Chinese representative noted the increase in EUFOR troops in BiH but supported EUFOR-ALTHEA's role in "maintaining security and stability in the country and in providing assistance in mine clearance and the fight against terrorism" (UNSC, 2022a). These sentiments were echoed in the UNSC's meeting about BiH in November 2023 (UNSC, 2023b).

Conclusions

Trends in Chinese and Russian perceptions towards the institutions responsible for the implementation of the Dayton Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina differ somewhat. For Russia, there was a negative turn in its perceptions of the OHR from 2008 onwards. While this coincided with the adoption of the 5+2 Agenda by PIC-SB, which highlighted the end goal of drawing down the OHR under the conditions set out in the Agenda, it also co-occurred with Russia's more assertive foreign policy globally. Furthermore, Russia's declining perceptions of PIC, PIC-SB, and EUFOR-ALTHEA came after the appointment of the current High Representative, Christian Schmidt, but also co-occurred with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russian assertiveness was a reaction to the ongoing so-called 'colour revolutions' in Russia's near abroad, a politically Westward leaning movement that swept across the former Soviet Union, culminating in conflicts with Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine starting in 2014. These were followed by anti-government protests in Russia and the Arab Uprisings, which spurred a Western-led military intervention that led to regime change in the case of Libya, something both Russia and China vehemently condemned. Both Russia and China have spoken out against the exploitation of peace processes and humanitarian interventions for political gains by the West, seen to be the replacement of regimes unfriendly towards the West with political systems formed in the Western liberal democratic model.

China remained largely positive vis-à-vis the institutions responsible for the implementation of the Dayton Accords until 2021, after Christian Schmidt's appointment to the OHR. Like Russia, China disapproved of PIC-SB's evasion of UNSC approval for the High Representative's appointment. This negative turn also coincided with increased economic interests in the country, which saw greater investment in infrastructure projects, particularly in Republika Srpska. Unlike Russia, however, Chinese representatives have remained largely positive about EUFOR-ALTHEA over the years.

While these differences can be accounted for in their varying approaches to foreign policy and peacebuilding, as well as the different contexts in which these two states operate, not least of all due to their broader foreign policy decisions, China and Russia also have different roles within the implementation of the Dayton Accords; Russia is a member of PIC's Steering Board, while China is not. Furthermore, Russia shares kinship ties to Bosnia's Serbian community, which cannot be said for China.

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About Us

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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