



EU Kosovo mission must learn from Bosnia mistakes

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SARAJEVO, February 12 (Reuters) - The European Union must avoid a heavy-handed approach, which characterised some international operations in Bosnia, when its officials assume a supervisory role in Kosovo, a think-tank warned on Monday.

A U.N. plan promises the breakaway Serbian province a form of supervised independence under the authority of an EU-led mission.

The mission chief, or International Civilian Representative, will have sweeping powers similar to those of Bosnia's High Representative, installed by the 1995 Dayton peace deal.

But the Berlin-based European Stability Initiative think-tank said Bosnia's experience showed that when international organisations overstep the mark, citizens are often powerless and cannot get a fair hearing for complaints.

"The entrenchment of the Balkan protectorates revives a question: to whom are international missions accountable and what happens when they make mistakes and violate rights of citizens in the territories they govern?" ESI said in its report.

It cites the controversial U.N.-led action between 1996 and 2002 to purge unsuitable officers from the Bosnian police. Some 800 of about 18,000 policemen were

banned for life from the force, without any chance to defend themselves or any right to appeal.

"As the U.N. mission scrambled to complete the task before the end of its mandate in Bosnia, mistakes were made, some of which resulted in serious injustice," ESI said.

Once the mistakes became known, international bodies such as the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, the United Nations and others "closed ranks", refusing either to remedy the errors or to allow Bosnian institutions to do so.

The report also said there should be foresight in Kosovo which has been run by the United Nations since 1999 after NATO bombs drove out Serb forces accused of atrocities in a two-year war with guerrillas.

Some among the ethnic Albanian majority there are already fed up with supervision. Two people died and two were seriously injured in a weekend protest which provoked a harsh response by U.N. and Kosovo police.

"When international organisations make mistakes, their instinct is to defend their own credibility, rather than protect individual rights," ESI concluded.

They "must not be permitted to assume the posture and the immunity of the Olympian gods," it added.