

## Turning point on Mount Olympus

On 10 February 2007 ESI published its report – *On Mount Olympus: How the UN violated human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and why nothing has been done to correct it.*

We found that the UN had declared 793 Bosnian police officers unfit to exercise police powers during the 1999-2002 vetting process in violation of Bosnian and international human rights standards. The UN had failed to offer the police officers the most basic procedural safeguards. Though the flaws in the process have long been public knowledge, the UN and other international agencies in Bosnia have also continued to deny that there was a problem, fearing a loss to their credibility and authority.

On 30 April 2007, after a long fight, all 793 Bosnians banned from serving as police officers under the UN certification process have been given permission to reapply for their posts. The UK [Presidency of the UN Security Council](#) has agreed that the policemen may reapply for their jobs as long as the police officers meet the standards set down in Bosnian law for police officials. These are basic standards which cover issues such as having Bosnian citizenship and a clean criminal record.

While [High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling](#) had lobbied for a UN-led review process, he has also welcomed the Security Council's decision as "the best possible solution" in the circumstances. It is indeed an important step forward. It amounts to a *de facto* recognition of the deficiencies of the UN's police vetting process. A draconian punishment – a lifetime ban from police service, loss of pension rights and in many cases being rendered unemployable – has been lifted, and the police officers now have the possibility of resuming their posts.

However, it is also insufficient. The UN still refuses to acknowledge its errors or assume responsibility for its actions. It has disregarded the calls by the Office of the High Representative as well as the Bosnian government and the [Council of Europe's Venice Commission](#) for an individual review process. The solution does not give the police officers an opportunity to clear their names individually, or any redress for loss of income and career prospects. Furthermore, the possibility of reapplying for their jobs may prove an empty gesture, given that Bosnia's police forces are being reduced drastically in size.

It is therefore up to the Bosnian governments to ensure that their citizens receive justice. To remedy the human rights violations, those police officers who were improperly decertified should be reinstated in their positions, with the right to back pay and the same opportunities for continuing employment as current police officers.

For its part, the UN would be well advised to learn from this embarrassing episode and to conduct future vetting processes in compliance with guidelines established by the [UN Secretary-General](#) and the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#).