The Council of the European Union appoints EUSRs under the authority of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, to advise and support national and regional political processes. As of August 2011, the European Union had eight EUSRs that are either based in Brussels or have an in-country presence in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sudan, Central Asia, Georgia, Afghanistan, the Great Lakes Region and the African Union. This marks a reduction from twelve last year, following the closure of EUSRs in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, the Middle East and the South Caucasus.

Indeed, the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has generated debate about the continued need for EU Special Representatives. On one hand, merging the functions of the EUSR with those of the head of the EU delegation would streamline European Union activities in crisis countries. On the other hand, it has been argued that the consolidation may come at the cost of weakened political flexibility and leverage. The regional mandates of the EUSRs for Central Asia and Great Lakes provide additional versatility that country-specific ambassadors do not have.

Nonetheless, the decision by the European Union not to name EUSRs for the recent crises in Cote d’Ivoire (where there is EU Delegation) and Libya (where an EU Office under the EEAS was established in Bengazi in May 2011), or for the Horn of Africa, where the European Union runs anti-piracy operations – as well as ongoing discussions on whether to close the EUSR for the Great Lakes Region – suggest that further consolidation of EUSRs may be underway.

One option for reconciling EUSRs and EU Delegations is “double-hatting.” In Afghanistan and at the African Union, the EUSR also functions as the head of the EEAS delegation. Under this arrangement, the EU Delegation is financed from the EEAS administrative budget, but through it the EUSR can access the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) budget, which, due to its size and different oversight arrangements, enables the EU to more flexibly finance its missions. Such an arrangement is currently under consideration in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the EU maintains a sizable military and police presence. In Kosovo, too, the interim appointment of an EUSR from within the ranks of the EEAS suggests adaptation of EUSRs, rather than their replacement.

institutions and most EU members to reiterate calls to close the OHR and to enhance the EU’s presence on the ground (including special sanctioning powers). The EU’s insistence on OHR closure stems from an institutional preference towards negotiating EU accession with self-governing entities. In this context, the appointment of a strengthened EUSR would provide the framework for BiH to transition into full sovereignty, while empowering European nations to adequately respond in the event of any potential future violations of the Dayton Accords. The US, however, expressed concerns about the EU’s ability to lead the reform process and continued to favor a strong OHR. In the absence of a general agreement on OHR closure, the European Council in March 2011 announced its intention to proceed with a new presence on the ground, led by a senior diplomat. It also approved a set of restrictive measures allowing member states to impose sanctions against persons whose actions are deemed to undermine Dayton.

The transition process, which will involve the transfer of 29 EUSR staff currently working in the OHR to the EU Delegation, is likely to occur at the end of August 2011, and will coincide with the expiration of HR Valentin Inzko’s EUSR mandate (Inzko will nonetheless remain as the HR). The new EU office will have a budget of approximately EUR 100 million attached to the accession framework. The EUSR, who will be functioning as the head of the Delegation, will continue to provide political facilitation, especially on issues related to EU integration - including constitutional reform - and overall coordination. While the EU continues to aim at closing down the OHR, the only change anticipated for 2011 is continued downsizing, including a budget cut of five percent by June 2011. Currently, the OHR maintains two regional offices in Brcko and Banja Luka.

The debate over the future of the OHR in BiH has flared up again in the context of political deterioration following the October 2010 elections. Tension between Croat and Bosniak parties increased dramatically after the formation of a new coalition government in the Federation that excluded the two most popular Croat parties. A