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## **Security Council Update I: Tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### ***Introduction***

The Balkan region has faced tension throughout for decades, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ethnic composition of countries in this region is diverse, however, ethnic differences have unfortunately resulted in tensions and violent conflicts, such conflicts reaching their height in the 1990's.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this time, the countries that comprised of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which include: modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia sought more individual representation. The increase in tension among ethnic groups living in this region worsened, leading to the Yugoslav Wars.<sup>2</sup> Such conflicts scattered throughout Yugoslavia lead to the region's split and culminated in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, while displacing millions more.<sup>3</sup>

The Yugoslav Wars maintain a reputation for being the most violent conflict in Europe since the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> The violence that ensued throughout the Yugoslav Wars originated in the Second World War as they share similarities in the ideological and ethnic conflicts that riddled both eras.<sup>5</sup> These wars involved many war crimes, including genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and rape.<sup>6</sup> The United Nations (UN) subsequently created the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as a vessel through which to prosecute the crimes committed during this conflict.<sup>7</sup> Since its creation, many individuals have been charged for the crimes committed during this time.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Bosnian Wars***

A major conflict within the Yugoslav Wars was the Bosnian War, a conflict that arose as tensions between Muslims, Croats, and Serbs increased, accumulating to full-scale conflict on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992.<sup>9</sup> Notably, the United States and the European Economic Community (EEC) both officially recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina on the day the conflict officially broke out.<sup>10</sup> In November 1995, negotiations took place at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, reaching an end and signed in Paris on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1995, officially concluding the Bosnian War.<sup>11</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result was divided into two autonomous regions, the Serb Republic, and the

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<sup>1</sup> "Transnational Justice in Former Yugoslavia," International Center for Transitional Justice, January 1, 2009 <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-FormerYugoslavia-Justice-Facts-2009-English.pdf> (Accessed October 5, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> "Transnational Justice in Former Yugoslavia," International Center for Transitional Justice.

<sup>3</sup> "Transnational Justice in Former Yugoslavia," International Center for Transitional Justice.

<sup>4</sup> "Bosnia" The Center for Justice and Accountability, <https://cja.org/where-we-work/bosnia/> (Accessed October 5, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> "Excerpt: The World and Yugoslavia's Wars." Council on Foreign Relations. 2017 <https://www.cfr.org/excerpt-world-and-yugoslavias-wars>. (Accessed October 6, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> "Bosnia" The Center for Justice and Accountability.

<sup>7</sup> "Bosnia" The Center for Justice and Accountability.

<sup>8</sup> "Bosnia" The Center for Justice and Accountability.

<sup>9</sup> Rogel, Carole, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and Its Aftermath*. Greenwood Publishing Group. pp. 59. (Accessed October 6, 2022)

<sup>10</sup> Rogel, Carole (2004). *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and Its Aftermath*.

<sup>11</sup> "15 years ago, Dayton Peace Accords: a milestone for NATO and the Balkans," NATO, December 14, 2010, (Accessed October 6, 2022)

Federation, the latter of which was dominated by Croats and Bosniaks.<sup>12</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently led by a tripartite presidency, which comprises of three presidents who represent Bosnia and Herzegovina's main ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> Currently, the three presidents are Milorad Dodik representing Serbs, Šefik Džaferović representing Bosniaks, and Željko Komšić representing Croats.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Recent Developments***

In October 2021, Milorad Dodik, the Serb representative in the tri-patriate presidency, announced in that the country's Serb-run entity, Republika Srpska, will quit key state institutions in order to achieve full autonomy, which is a violation of the 1995 peace accords.<sup>15</sup> In December 2021, Serb lawmakers voted to initiate the removal of the autonomous Serb Republic out of Bosnia's armed forces, judiciary and tax system, in a motion that some see as the beginning towards secession.<sup>16</sup>

The official European Union ambassador to Russia stated that, "Bosnia should be free of international supervision. I believe the country needs to get rid of this stifling supervision once and for good. The time has come for the Office of the High Representative to become a thing of the past."<sup>17</sup> In response, many federal governments including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy as well as the European Union delegation released the following joint statement, "Members of the governing coalition in the RS (Republika Srpska) must be aware that continuing this dead end path of challenging the Dayton framework is damaging the economic prospects of the entity, threatening the stability of the country and the entire region and jeopardizing Bosnia's future with the EU."<sup>18</sup>

### ***Current Situation***

With the growing pressure within the country, more EU peacekeeping forces have been deployed in an effort to strengthen and maintain stability.<sup>19</sup> While there have been peacekeeping forces in Bosnia since 2004, they had been scaled down to about 600 prior to the present tensions.<sup>20</sup> That number was doubled in February 2022.<sup>21</sup>

Bosnia and Herzegovina are currently facing a crisis as tensions between Serbs and Croats have reignited due to separatist policies of the prior and blockade threats from the latter.<sup>22</sup> Ahead of the 2022 election, voters were discouraged and uninspired as they see a lack of new ideas from political candidates.<sup>23</sup> A recent poll indicated that over 40 percent of Bosnians believed the electoral system fails to accurately represent citizens' needs.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gadzo, Mersiha. "Bosnia's Political Crisis: What You Should Know, in 600 Words." Al Jazeera, November 24, 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/21/all-you-need-to-know-about-bosnias-crisis-in-600-words>. (Accessed October 7, 2022)

<sup>13</sup> Rettman, Andrew. "Russia Wants Bosnia Free of Western Supervision." EUobserver, (Accessed October 7, 2022) <https://euobserver.com/world/153814>.

<sup>14</sup> Rettman, Andrew. "Russia Wants Bosnia Free of Western Supervision." EUobserver.

<sup>15</sup> Gadzo, Mersiha. "Bosnia's Political Crisis: What You Should Know, in 600 Words." Al Jazeera, November 24, 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/21/all-you-need-to-know-about-bosnias-crisis-in-600-words> (Accessed October 7, 2022)

<sup>16</sup> Gadzo, Mersiha. "Bosnia's Political Crisis: What You Should Know, in 600 Words."

<sup>17</sup> Rettman, Andrew. "Russia Wants Bosnia Free of Western Supervision." EUobserver, <https://euobserver.com/world/153814>. (Accessed October 5, 2022)

<sup>18</sup> Sito-sucic, Daria. "Serbs Vote to Start Quitting Bosnia's Key Institutions in Secessionist Move." Reuters, December 11, 2021 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbs-vote-start-quitting-bosnias-key-institutions-secessionist-move-2021-12-10/> (Accessed October 5, 2022)

<sup>19</sup> Latal, Srečko "EU Doubles Bosnia Peacekeepers as Global Security 'Deteriorates,'" BalkanInsight, February 24, 2022 <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/02/24/eu-doubles-bosnia-peacekeepers-as-global-security-deteriorates/> (Accessed November 5, 2022)

<sup>20</sup> Latal, Srečko "EU Doubles Bosnia Peacekeepers as Global Security 'Deteriorates,'" BalkanInsight.

<sup>21</sup> Latal, Srečko "EU Doubles Bosnia Peacekeepers as Global Security 'Deteriorates,'" BalkanInsight.

<sup>22</sup> "Bosnia Election: Growing Ethnic Tensions Dominate Polls." Aljazeera.com. Al Jazeera. October 2, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/2/bosnia-heads-to-polls-as-ethnic-tensions-dominate-vote>. (Accessed October 7, 2022)

<sup>23</sup> "Bosnia Election: Growing Ethnic Tensions Dominate Polls." Aljazeera.

<sup>24</sup> "Bosnia Election: Growing Ethnic Tensions Dominate Polls." Aljazeera.

As seen throughout many parts of the global community, nationalism is on the rise within Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>25</sup> Bosnia is going through its worst political crisis since the end of the Bosnian Wars due to separatist policies of the Serb leadership and threats of blockades by Bosnian Croats.<sup>26</sup> On October 6<sup>th</sup>, thousands protested the results of what they claim were “rigged elections” in favor of Dodik, who is considered to be a pro-Russian nationalist, in the for the vote of the Serb Republic.<sup>27</sup> Protests such as these have led to fears of increased violence in the region and a potential outbreak of conflicts that the region has tried to move on from for decades.<sup>28</sup>

Weeks after the initial October 2 election, the results were finally certified, solidifying Dodik’s hold on the Serb Republic’s presidency.<sup>29</sup> Initially, opposition parties requested ballot recounts and filed court complaints alleging election fraud, but ultimately the appeals court dismissed those complaints, and the elections commission certified the results.<sup>30</sup> Notably, Dodik declared victory in front of thousands of supporters before the election had been certified.<sup>31</sup> Since the certification of the results, there have been numerous demonstrations by opposition supporters.<sup>32</sup> One such protest included hundreds of opposition supporters gathering around the Serb Republic’s official broadcaster chanting “Mile Thief” referring to Dobrik.<sup>33</sup> Following the election results, the UN Security Council voted to support the extension of the EU Peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>34</sup> This move allows peacekeepers to remain in the area for another year.<sup>35</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This growing unrest in Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly concerning, given the additional pressures placed on the situation with Dodik’s pro-Russian stance and close partnership with Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>36</sup> While Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partner, Dodik continues this close relationship with Putin, having met with him numerous times in the last few years.<sup>37</sup> Notably, Dodik refused to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine earlier this year.<sup>38</sup> Delegates should be acutely aware of the delicate nature of the ethnic relationships within Bosnia as well as the larger impacts that further instability could case within the region and the European continent.

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<sup>25</sup> “Bosnia Election: Growing Ethnic Tensions Dominate Polls.” Aljazeera.

<sup>26</sup> “Bosnia Election: Growing Ethnic Tensions Dominate Polls.” Aljazeera.

<sup>27</sup> Bosnian Serb opposition calls election ‘rigged’, stages protest, Reuters, October 6, 2022

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnian-serb-opposition-calls-election-rigged-stages-protest-2022-10-06/> (Accessed October 7, 2022)

<sup>28</sup> Bosnian Serb opposition calls election ‘rigged’, stages protest, Reuters.

<sup>29</sup> Grulovic, Fedja & Daria Sito-Sucic, “Bosnian Serb Opposition Protests Against ‘Stolen’ Election Results,” Reuters, November 2, 2022 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnian-serb-opposition-protests-against-stolen-election-results-2022-11-02/> (Accessed November 5, 2022)

<sup>30</sup> Grulovic, Fedja & Daria Sito-Sucic, “Bosnian Serb Opposition Protests Against ‘Stolen’ Election Results,” Reuters.

<sup>31</sup> Grulovic, Fedja & Daria Sito-Sucic, “Bosnian Serb Opposition Protests Against ‘Stolen’ Election Results,” Reuters.

<sup>32</sup> Grulovic, Fedja & Daria Sito-Sucic, “Bosnian Serb Opposition Protests Against ‘Stolen’ Election Results,” Reuters.

<sup>33</sup> Grulovic, Fedja & Daria Sito-Sucic, “Bosnian Serb Opposition Protests Against ‘Stolen’ Election Results,” Reuters.

<sup>34</sup> Gotev, Gregori “UN Renews Bosnia Peacekeeping Force Amid Political Unrest” EURACTIV, November 3, 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/un-renews-bosnia-peacekeeping-force-amid-political-unrest/> (Accessed November 5, 2022)

<sup>35</sup> Gotev, Gregori “UN Renews Bosnia Peacekeeping Force Amid Political Unrest” EURACTIV.

<sup>36</sup> Karcic, Hamza “Putin’s Most Loyal Balkan Client” Foreign Policy, October 7, 2022

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/07/bosnia-elections-milorad-dodik-putin-russia/> (Accessed November 5, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> “Partners” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/51288.htm> (Accessed November 5, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Karcic, Hamza “Putin’s Most Loyal Balkan Client” Foreign Policy, October 7, 2022

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/07/bosnia-elections-milorad-dodik-putin-russia/> (Accessed November 5, 2022).