

To:  
Josep Borrell, High Representative/First Vice President of the European  
Commission  
Christian Schmidt, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina



Subject: RS and Serb nationalists on the verge to let the BiH and Western Balkan powder keg  
explode – risking a next Balkan war

Strasbourg, 21 October 2021

Dear High Representative/First Vice President,  
Dear High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina,

It is with gravest concern that we follow the latest escalations of tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). They specifically relate to the recent concrete steps towards the secession of Republika Srpska (RS), undertaken by the nationalist political leadership of the RS entity and accompanied by an escalating militarization of police troops of the RS and their military exercises with troops from neighbouring Serbia.

The political landscape in BiH over the last years, and even more over the last few months, is characterised by rising tensions due to the unconstitutional illegitimate attempt of deadlocking all institutions on state level undertaken mainly by the Serb Member of the tripartite Presidency. The votes in the respective entity, namely the RS Assembly, announced for next week are without precedent and, despite being illegal and unconstitutional as well as violating the Dayton Agreement, have the potential to generate concrete grounds for the RS leadership to pursue with their secessionist agenda and thereby endangering stability and even peace in the whole Western Balkans. If pursued continuously, tensions will mount and an armed conflict in other areas and other WB countries could follow.

The votes foreseen for next week in the Assembly of Republika Srpska concern an unconstitutional withdrawal of consent to the formation of the BiH Armed Forces, a High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council and an Indirect Taxation Authority (BiH ITA). Such votes are unequivocally violating the core legal structures on which BiH rests, including its constitution and the Dayton Peace Agreement. They are a direct threat to peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkan region as a whole.

As the abovementioned consents stem from votes of the Federal Parliament of BiH, i.e. at the responsible state level, it is not the competence of the Assembly of any entity, in this case of the Republika Srpska, to withdraw any of the acts of consent, making the votes legally void. The foreseen votes would therefore constitute yet another provocation, but undoubtedly would encourage RS office holders and political leaders.

Moreover, given the similarities to events in 1992 just before the outbreak of the Bosnian War and given the complex political landscape of BiH, it is very likely, that parts of the population will react to the fact, that such votes should not take place, and that they will not become accepted legally or politically. Such votes could spark turmoil.

The word of “war“ has never been used as often and widely throughout the Balkans as in recent weeks and months, ranging from Bosnia Herecegovina to Kosovo and beyond. All the tensions have one common denominator: Serbia as originator and supporter of the so-called “Serb World“, as can be heard from officials of the Serbian government. Just a few weeks ago the President of Serbia threatened Kosovo and even NATO with war over the license plate dispute with Kosovo, which fortunately was avoided thanks to the political intervention of NATO and the mediation of the EU and respective governments.

The votes foreseen in the RS Assembly have the potential to endanger the stability of BiH and the region, the Dayton Peace Agreement as well as the countries, and the whole Western Balkans’, perspective for EU accession. We therefore urge the OHR and the EU to issue a strong and possibly joint statement condemning the vote in strong terms, as well as declaring it illegal. Further, we trust and expect that in the coming week, the EU and the OHR will use all possible diplomatic influence, and finally also the OHR Bonn Powers, to bring the nationalist forces in the RS political leadership to reason.

We are of the opinion that clear and firm consequences must follow, if such votes are held against all warnings of the EU and the US. We therefore ask, both the HR/VP and the OHR: What concrete measures, including sanctions or the removal from office of those responsible, are being considered in order to maintain the territorial integrity of BiH and the peace in the region?

Besides the political challenges with the current situation, we underline the crucial importance of EUFOR Althea whose tasks is, amongst others, to secure the Dayton Peace Agreement, and within that framework the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is of utmost importance that EUFOR Althea will be provided with all means necessary to fulfil its mission and that everything necessary at EU, UN, NATO and international level is done, to have its mandate renewed as planned by a vote in the UN Security Council in November.

Thank you in advance for your response.

Kind Regards,

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Michael Gahler (EPP, AFET coordinator)  
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