
BOSNIA MAYOR AND SERBIAN PM APPEAL FOR PEACE

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As tensions worsen in Bosnia, Serbia's Prime Minister and the Mayor of the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica have spoken in New York of the need to keep the peace.

As tensions rise in Bosnia and the Balkans, the Mayor of the Bosnian town of Srebrenica and Serbia's Prime Minister spoke together in New York on Tuesday on the difficulty of promoting relationships between Bosniaks and Serbs.

At a Clinton Foundation panel discussion, Mayor Camil Durakovic said it had not been easy to hug Prime Minister Aleksander Vucic at the Potocari memorial to the Srebrenica massacre - where dignitaries gather every July 11 to commemorate more than 7,000 people killed in the town by Bosnian Serbs in 1995.

Maybe it was not a good thing [politically] for me to hug Vucic in the middle of 7,000 graves, as the Mayor of Srebrenica and as a Bosniak survivor of the genocide. But I did, because we were both brave, said Durakovic.

Admitting he had received criticism for this, he added: All people in the Balkans who think that peace has [an] alternative - they don't know.

Vucic, meanwhile, told the New York audience that the outlook for peace in the region had worsened.

[It] is not easy at all. It's even more difficult today than it was last year, than it was 20 years ago. And it's becoming more and more difficult, he said.

Vucic, who spoke slowly and appeared troubled, said Bosniaks and Serbs would need to work and live together, or face disaster together. Otherwise I'm very much afraid for the future of the Western Balkans once again, he said.

Former US president Bill Clinton, who moderated the discussion, praised both Vucic and Durakovic for their courage.

Their display of unity came the same day as Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic - also speaking from New York, where he is attending the UN General Assembly - warned that Belgrade would certainly not allow military aggression against the mainly Serbian entity in Bosnia, Republika

Srpska.

Dacics words were a response to the former wartime Bosnian Army commander, Safer Halilovic, who earlier this week said that without Serbian support, Republika Srpska would not be able to resist an attack for more than 15 days.

Halilovics talk of an "attack" was viewed as a serious escalation of the war of words over a planned referendum in Republika Srpska, RS, which is set to take place this Sunday, September 25.

The plebiscite seeks popular support to celebrate the entitys public holiday on January 9, but diplomats and analysts are concerned that it is a prelude to a future referendum on RS secession.

Bosnias constitutional court has ruled the vote illegal, but RS President Milorad Dodik has vowed to hold it regardless.

Photo: Balkan Insight

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