
BOSNIAN SERB LEADER CALLS FOR "PEACEFUL" CHANGE OF BALKAN BORDERS

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Dodik, president of post-war Bosnias autonomous Serb Republic, has long called for secession from Bosnia and lately urged Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic to put the issue on the agenda when in talks with big power policymakers.

Dodik, also popular among nationalists in Serbia, has stepped up pressure on Vucic to back his secessionist bid. But Vucic, a former nationalist now seeking to meet conditions for Serbia to join the European Union, has repeatedly said he respects Bosnias territorial integrity and sovereignty.

We need to open talks, Dodik said in an interview for the Belgrade-based private Pink television. There does not have to be war, it can be resolved through political means.

Separatist sentiment in the Serb Republic is raising concern among the Western overseers of Bosnias 1990s peace deal about a relapse into turmoil in the Balkans.

The Bosnian Serbs rejection of an independent, multi-ethnic Bosnia in 1992 triggered an avalanche of bloodshed in which Serbs and Croats carved out ethnically pure statelets with the backing of kin in neighboring Serbia and Croatia.

The war, in which about 100,000 people died, was ended by the 1995 Dayton peace agreement which divided the country into two highly autonomous regions, the Serb Republic and the Federation dominated by Croats and Muslim Bosniaks.

Dodiks SNSD party announced a referendum on the Serb Republics independence in 2018 but has postponed it. Instead, Dodik will run for the Serb seat on Bosnias three-way inter-ethnic presidency in the October general election.

He told Pink TV that in that capacity he would be better placed to protect the Serb Republic from any usurpation of its powers by Bosnias central government in Sarajevo.

Most Serbs would vote to join Serbia if a referendum was organized today. This has been a taboo until now; we were not allowed to do anything, he added, citing what he called international pressure against such a referendum.

Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic on a visit to Sarajevo said that Belgrade respected the integrity of Bosnia.

(This) is a guarantor of the Dayton peace treaty and (Serbia) will respect any agreement that is reached with a mutual consensus of its three ethnic groups, he told Reuters.

European Union officials say that Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia, which all aspire to join the bloc, must first settle territorial disputes dating to the 1990s wars that followed the collapse of then-federal Yugoslavia.

Dodik also backed the creation of a third, Croat only-dominated region in Bosnia, an option increasingly advocated by Bosnian Croat nationalists and strongly opposed by Bosniaks - the biggest victims of the 1992-95 war - and Western powers.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-security-serbs/bosnian-serb-leader-calls-for-peaceful-change-of-balkan-borders-idUSKCN1GS2EW>

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