
BOSNIAN MINISTER FLOATS HOPES OF PROGRESS TOWARDS NATO

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With a meeting of NATO foreign ministers scheduled for December 5 in Brussels, Bosnian Defence Minister Marina Pendes said on Tuesday that she hopes they will recommend the activation of the country's Membership Action Plan, MAP, eight years after it was first proposed.

But Pendes cautioned that this would just be a step on the road to eventual membership.

"Activating the MAP does not mean Bosnia will become a NATO member tomorrow, and people often misinterpret the MAP," she told Bosnian daily newspaper Dnevni Avaz.

The Western military alliance declined to say whether the activation of the Bosnian membership plan would be on the agenda at the Brussels meeting.

"Further details about the agenda and timing of the December meeting of NATO foreign ministers will be made public closer to the time," NATO press officer Dylan White told BIRN.

Pendes pointed out that the main condition required by the alliance - registration of military property on a state level - has not yet been fulfilled.

But Pendes also said that Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown its commitment to NATO through the involvement of Bosnian soldiers in various peace missions led by the alliance.

On several occasions this year, Pendes has expressed optimism that the activation of the NATO membership plan is likely to happen during 2018.

"It is a matter of days when the MAP will be activated... I believe this will happen in 2018," Pendes told regional TV station N1 in July.

NATO foreign ministers invited Bosnia to join the MAP, a programme of advice, assistance and practical support for countries wishing to join the alliance, in 2010.

The activation of the MAP, however, was conditioned on the registration at the state level of military property which is currently under the control of the Bosnian two entities, the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska and the Bosniak- and Croat-dominated Federation.

Bosnian Serb officials strongly oppose the idea of state-level military property, insisting it should be the entities responsibility.

After the state-level Constitutional Court ruled in August 2017 that a military facility in Han Pijesak

must be registered to the state, Bosnia was given the opportunity to accelerate the process.

Despite that, only 33 of a total of 63 military properties previously owned by the former Yugoslav Peoples Army have been fully registered in the country, data from the Bosnian Defence Ministry shows.

Meanwhile Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik has said repeatedly that he will seek to block efforts for the country to one day become a member of NATO, insisting on military neutrality, in line with Serbia.

Denis Hadzovic, a security expert from the Centre for Security Studies of Sarajevo, said that Bosnian political parties should try to start a serious discussion about MAP.

The perspective of NATO integration is stated in all key documents about our country, but so far, we have just seen a lot of media statements coming from various politicians * this issue was never properly discussed in our institutions, Hadzovic told BIRN.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnia-s-fragile-hope-to-activate-map-for-nato-11-13-2018>

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