
NATO GIVES BOSNIA GREEN LIGHT TO MOVE TOWARD MEMBERSHIP

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NATO foreign ministers have agreed to activate the military alliances program of advice and assistance for Bosnia-Herzegovina, despite Bosnian Serb objections to membership.

Meeting in Brussels on December 5, the ministers invited Bosnia to submit its first annual national program of political, economic, and defense reforms aimed at bringing aspiring countries into line with the alliance's standards.

The move is part of NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) process, but it doesn't mean that the ethnically-divided Balkans country will join anytime soon.

And it's unclear whether Sarajevo will accept NATO's invitation.

"We made our decision: we are ready to receive their annual national program. But let them decide and we are ready if they are ready," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters after the Brussels meeting.

The alliance offered a MAP to Bosnia in 2010 but declined to "activate" it until all conditions were met.

The process held up over the registration of immovable defense property at the federal level, with the ethnic Serb-dominated Republika Srpska -- one of the two entities that make up Bosnia -- opposing the move.

NATO allies have decided to move forward rather than allow the Bosnian Serbs to have a de facto veto over the MAP, but the property must still be registered at a federal level for the MAP process to conclude.

Serb nationalist Milorad Dodik, the current head of the rotating chairmanship of Bosnia's three-part presidency, has long been a vocal opponent of Bosnia's membership in NATO.

Bosnian Muslim presidency member, Sefik Dzaferovic, said in a statement that NATO's invitation will give new impetus for the country to reach one of its "most important foreign policy goals."

Dzaferovic also said he expected Bosnian institutions to "immediately start preparing the annual program of reforms in cooperation with NATO."

That view was also expressed by the ethnic Croat member of the presidency, Zeljko Komisc.

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