
CROATIAN DIPLOMAT RECALLED FOR 'ATTENDING BOSNIAN SERB CELEBRATION'

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The Croatian foreign ministry said on Thursday that it will investigate whether its ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ivan Del Vechio, attended celebrations of the disputed Bosnian Serb statehood day in Banja Luka, the administrative centre of Republika Srpska, on January 9.

At the request of [Croatian] Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, [Foreign] Minister Marija Pejcinovic Buric withdrew ambassador Del Vechio to Zagreb for consultations today, the ministry wrote on Twitter.

The ministry was not aware of the departure of ambassador Ivan Del Vechio for Banja Luka on the occasion of the unconstitutional Day of Republika Srpska, and will thoroughly examine how it happened, it said.

Del Vechio admitted he was in Banja Luka but denied he attended a parade to mark the Day of Republika Srpska, which has been declared unconstitutional by Bosnias state-level Constitutional Court and has repeatedly heightened ethnic tensions.

I can only say I was not present at the parade and gala event [hosted by Republika Srpska officials], Del Vechio told Sarajevo-based news site Klix.ba on Thursday.

The Croatian foreign ministry expressed anger that a former Yugoslav Peoples Army officer, Slavko Lisica, who was convicted in Croatia of war crimes, was honoured as part of the Day of Republika Srpska celebrations.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemns the awarding of an honour to former JNA officer S. Lisice, who was legally convicted of war crimes in Croatia, it said.

The celebrations on Wednesday were held to mark the 27th anniversary of the creation of the Republika Srpska entity in 1992 □ an event which many Bosniaks see as the precursor to the outbreak of the war a few months later.

Denis Zvizdic, the chair of the Bosnian Council of Ministers, described Del Vechio's visit to Banja Luka as shocking.

This move will disable any form of personal contact and further cooperation, Zvizdic said in a statement on Thursday.

Bosnias state-level Constitutional Court ruled in November 2015 that holding the annual Bosnian Serb holiday on January 9 was discriminatory against non-Serbs in Republika Srpska because it is

also a Serbian Orthodox religious holiday - the day of St Stephen, who is the patron saint of the entity.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/raw-over-croatian-ambassador-to-bosnia-attending-disputed-rs-holiday-01-10-2019>

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