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## **BOSNIAN SERB LEADER REPEATS DEMAND FOR SECESSION REFERENDUM**

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Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik has repeated demands for a referendum on the status of the Serb-led entity in Bosnia, Republika Srpska, after meeting Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Belgrade.

Vucic said after the meeting that he had invited Dodik, Republika Srpska President Zeljka Cvijanovic and representatives of the Serbs in Montenegro to a further meeting on the situation facing Serbs in both Bosnia and Montenegro. Vucic also said he had told Dodik, that whatever they plan to do, do it legally and democratically, through institutions, without any widespread destabilisation of the entire region.

Dodik, however, said that while he had no wish to destabilise the region, the Bosnian Serbs had a right to decide their own future.

Finally, the people will decide. We will ask that the status of the RS be decided through a referendum. I have heard President Vucic present arguments for keeping the peace. That is all right. But a time comes when people cannot allow us to be stupid. We support Serbia and its policies but we conduct our own authentic policies, Dodik told the same press conference.

Tensions have flared anew in Bosnia since the Constitutional Court outlawed a law passed in the Republika Srpska on farmland that used to belong to the Yugoslav state, which had declared it property of the RS. The court ruled that the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, not the RS, was the owner of such land.

In protest against the ruling, representatives of the Bosnian Serbs in state institutions have stopped work, effectively halting the state government, pending adoption of a new law on the Constitutional Court that excludes foreign judges. Bosnian Serbs have long objected to the powers of the Constitutional Court □ and especially to the presence on the court of a number of foreign judges.

On Friday, the US, Britain, Germany, France, Italy and the EU Delegation in Bosnia said in a joint statement that unilateral withdrawals from Bosnian state institutions or blockades on decision-making within them were unacceptable, and the decisions of the Constitutional Court were final and binding, and must be implemented.

The Western powers said solutions to arguments over the composition of the Constitutional Court were possible within prescribed procedures, along with wider reforms as proposed by the EU.

The Bosnian Serbs are not alone in their objection to the presence of foreign judges, however. The Croatian National Assembly, HNS, an umbrella organisation uniting Bosnian Croat political parties, also said it supported removing foreign judges from the Constitutional Court.

On the anniversary of [Bosnia] applying for EU membership, more than ever we must remain committed to European values and strongly committed to further integration and membership of the European Union and NATO, as well as the departure of foreign judges, the HNS said on Saturday.

Turning to the separate issue of Montenegro, the Serbian President said after the meeting in Belgrade that Belgrade would continue to support the RS and the Serbian minority in Montenegro.

Since Montenegros parliament passed a law on religion on December 27, 2019, many members of the Serbian community have been protesting twice a week, demanding its withdrawal, saying the law poses a threat to the assets of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the country.

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