



Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Dayton agreement

Debate on 16 December 2021

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On 16 December 2021, the House of Lords is due to debate a motion moved by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative) that “this House takes note of the importance of the constitutional integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and of upholding the Dayton agreement”.

In 1995, representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Yugoslavia (then comprising Serbia and Montenegro) signed a peace agreement known as the Dayton agreement. This established Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a single state comprised of two entities. These two entities are the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, principally comprised of Bosnia Muslim and Croat-majority areas, and Republika Srpska, principally comprised of Serb majority areas. The three-person presidency of BiH was also established. Each of these presidents represent one of the three main ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs.

Responsibility for the implementation of the military aspects of the Dayton agreement was handed to NATO. In 2004, NATO forces handed over responsibility for supporting the stability of BiH to an EU-led force. The Dayton agreement gave responsibility for implementing its civilian aspects to a specially appointed high representative for BiH.

In October 2021, the Serb member of the BiH presidency, Milorad Dodik, said Republika Srpska would withdraw from BiH state institutions including the army, judiciary and the country’s tax system. In November 2021, the current high representative, Christian Schmidt, published a report criticising Dodik. He accused him of pursuing secessionist policies for Republika Srpska and seeking to undermine the Dayton agreement. Schmidt said BiH now faced its gravest existential threat since the end of the Bosnian War in 1995.

Following the publication of the high representative’s report, the UK Government has stated its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH. It has also said it supports the maintenance of the settlement established by the Dayton agreement and the work of the high representative. Similar statements have been made by the US Government, the EU and NATO.

Members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords have raised concerns about the situation in BiH. During a debate in the House of Commons on 2 December 2021, MPs criticised the threats by the Bosnian Serb leadership to withdraw from state institutions. Members of both Houses have also criticised Russia, accusing its Government of seeking to undermine peace and stability in the western Balkans and block attempts by BiH to join NATO and the EU.

1. Bosnian War (1992–95)

BiH is one of five successor states to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ).¹ The other states are Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro. These states originally formed socialist republics within the SFRJ. In 1991, both Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from the SFRJ. In January 1992, the Bosnian Government announced it would hold a referendum on independence from Yugoslavia.² In the same month, Bosnian Serbs declared a separate “Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The Bosnian Government responded by declaring the Serb republic to be illegal. Following a referendum which was boycotted by the majority of Bosnian Serbs, BiH declared independence in March 1992.

At the time it declared independence, Bosnian Muslims (who from the mid-1990s used the term Bosniak for themselves) comprised 43.5% of the population in BiH, with Serbs and Croats making up 31.2% and 17.4% respectively.³ Religious affiliation both then and now is roughly equated with ethnicity, with the Serbs primarily belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Croats mostly being members of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ethnic divisions and territorial claims led to a civil war in BiH which lasted from 1992 to 1995. It is estimated that this war left more than 100,000 dead.⁴ Numerous war crimes were committed during this conflict, including the murder of between 7,000–8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica and Zepa in July 1995.⁵ This massacre has been labelled as a genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) established in 1993.

Further information on the Bosnian war is provided in the House of Lords Library briefing ‘[End of the Bosnian War: 25 years on](#)’.⁶

2. Dayton agreement

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH (GFA) was signed by representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Yugoslavia (then comprising Serbia and Montenegro) on 14 December 1995.⁷ The GFA is referred to as the Dayton agreement or Dayton accords, named after the US city of Dayton, Ohio, where the GFA had been initiated the previous month. Since 1995, the implementation of the Dayton agreement has been overseen by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), a group consisting of 55 countries and agencies including the UK, the USA, Russia, NATO and the UN.⁸

¹ UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, ‘[What is the former Yugoslavia?](#)’, accessed 8 December 2021.

² Tim Judah, ‘[Bosnia to hold vote on independence](#)’, *Times (£)*, 27 January 1992, accessed via the Times Digital Archive.

³ Federal Bureau for Statistics figures reproduced in Fran Markowitz, ‘[Census and sensibilities in Sarajevo](#)’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, January 2007, Table I: ‘The Last Yugoslav Census: Bosnia-Herzegovina’s 1991 Population according to Ethnicity’.

⁴ International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, ‘[The conflicts](#)’, accessed 8 December 2021.

⁵ International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, ‘[Facts about Srebrenica](#)’, accessed 7 December 2021.

⁶ House of Lords Library, ‘[End of the Bosnian war: 25 years on](#)’, 9 November 2020.

⁷ NATO, ‘[General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)’, accessed 6 December 2021.

⁸ Office of the High Representative, ‘[Peace Implementation Council](#)’, accessed 8 December 2021.

Under the Dayton agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a single state consisting of two political entities:

- The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, principally comprised of Bosniak and Croat-majority areas.
- Republika Srpska, principally comprised of Serb majority areas.

Each of these two entities has its own president, government, parliament, police and other bodies.

In addition to these two entities, Brčko holds a special status.⁹ The district is self-governing under direct state sovereignty. Positioned in the north-east of the country, Brčko borders both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. A decision on the status of Brčko was postponed in the Dayton agreement, pending arbitration.¹⁰ In 1997, Brčko was established as a self-governing district.¹¹

Map: National and entity borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹²



The BiH head of state is a presidency made up of three members.¹³ Each member of the presidency represents one of the three main ethnic and religious groups in the country. Other state-level

⁹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, [Bosnia and Herzegovina general elections, 7 October 2018](#), 25 January 2019, p 4.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, [‘Brčko arbitration: proposal for peace’](#), 20 January 1997.

¹¹ Office of the High Representative, [‘Arbitral tribunal for dispute over inter-entity boundary in Brčko area, final award’](#), 14 February 1997.

¹² Wikimedia Commons, [‘Bosnia and Herzegovina—CIA WFB map’](#), accessed 8 December 2021.

¹³ Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, [‘Chronology of the Presidency of BiH’](#), accessed 7 December 2021.

institutions include the BiH parliament, central executive, the armed forces and the state-level judiciary.¹⁴

2.1 Implementing the Dayton agreement

High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina was created in 1995 under the Dayton agreement.¹⁵ The role of the Office of the High Representative is to oversee the civilian aspects of the Dayton agreement. Former holders of this office include Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon (Liberal Democrat), who held this post from May 2002 to January 2006. The high representative is advised by the Steering Board of the PIC.¹⁶

In 2005, the War Crimes Chamber of the Court of BiH (BWCC) was established in order to investigate crimes committed during the Bosnian War.¹⁷ This followed an overhaul of the BiH national justice system by Valentin Inzko, the then high representative. The Special Department for War Crimes, an office within the BiH Prosecutor's Office, also began its work in 2005.¹⁸

Operation Althea

Responsibility for implementing the military aspects of the Dayton agreement was given to NATO.¹⁹ A NATO-led Implementation Force was deployed in December 1995. This force was replaced a year later by the NATO-led Stabilisation Force.

In 2004, the NATO-led Stabilisation Force was replaced by an EU led military operation, the European Union Force in BiH (EUFOR). The name of this military operation is Operation Althea. Under the Berlin Plus agreement between the EU and NATO, reached in 2002, NATO provides logistic and command support for the EU mission.²⁰ NATO also maintains a headquarters in Sarajevo.

Since 2007, EUFOR has comprised approximately 600 personnel.²¹ It receives its mandate to provide support to the BiH authorities from the UN Security Council.²² This is referred to as its executive mandate. The executive mandate was most recently renewed on 3 November 2021.²³

¹⁴ European Commission, '[Bosnia and Herzegovina: main executive and legislative bodies](#)', 30 November 2021 and [Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina home page](#), accessed December 2021.

¹⁵ Office of the High Representative, '[General information](#)', accessed 7 December 2021.

¹⁶ Office of the High Representative, '[Peace Implementation Council](#)', accessed 8 December 2021.

¹⁷ International Center for Transitional Justice, '[The War Crimes Chamber in Bosnia and Herzegovina: from hybrid to domestic court](#)', 2008.

¹⁸ Bosnia and Herzegovina Government, '[Department I \(Special Department for War Crimes\)](#)', accessed 6 December 2021.

¹⁹ NATO, '[Peace support operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)', 26 April 2019.

²⁰ European Council, '[Berlin Plus agreement](#)', 2004.

²¹ European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, '[About EUFOR](#)', 14 January 2021.

²² *ibid.*

²³ United Nations, '[Security Council extends European-led stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 12 months, unanimously adopting Resolution 2549 \(2020\)](#)', 5 November 2020.

The UK's participation in Operation Althea ended on 31 December 2020.²⁴ Since January 2021, the UK has maintained a military presence in BiH through the secondment of staff officers to NATO HQ in Sarajevo.²⁵ NATO HQ provides support for the EUFOR and capacity building for the BiH armed forces.²⁶ The UK also provides bilateral defence assistance to the BiH armed forces.²⁷

3. Developments since Dayton

3.1 NATO and EU membership

BiH has applied for membership of both NATO and the EU. BiH applied for EU membership in February 2016 and is currently recognised by the EU as a potential candidate.²⁸ BiH was invited to join NATO's membership action plan (MAP) in 2010.²⁹ As part of the process, BiH submits an annual report on their preparations for possible future NATO membership.

Russia has stated its opposition to BiH joining NATO. In March 2021, Russia's Embassy in Sarajevo said that a "practical rapprochement between BiH and NATO" would be seen by Russia as a "hostile act".³⁰

3.2 Milorad Dodik presidency of Republika Srpska (2010–18)

Over the past decade, the political leadership of Republika Srpska have questioned the legitimacy of BiH state institutions. Support for Bosnian Serb nationalism has also brought the Republika Srpska leadership into conflict with these institutions. Milorad Dodik, leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats party, was elected as President of Republika Srpska in 2010 and held this office until 2018. In 2011, Dodik called for a state referendum to reject the bodies established in 2005 to investigate crimes committed during the Bosnian War.³¹ Dodik subsequently agreed not to hold a referendum following a meeting with EU officials.³²

In 2016, Dodik held a referendum on celebrating the anniversary of the founding of Republika Srpska as a breakaway state on 9 January 1992.³³ This was in spite of a ruling by the BiH Constitutional Court banning the vote on the grounds that it was discriminatory against non-Serbs. Following the referendum, sanctions were imposed on Dodik by the United States.³⁴

²⁴ House of Lords, '[Written question: Bosnia and Herzegovina: EU defence policy](#)', 3 February 2021, HL12647.

²⁵ NATO Allied Joint Force Command Naples, '[UK flag raising ceremony at Camp Butmir](#)', 15 January 2021.

²⁶ NATO Allied Joint Force Command Naples, '[What is NATO HQ Sarajevo?](#)', accessed 7 December 2021.

²⁷ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, '[Correspondence with the Foreign Secretary relating to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the future of the Dayton Accord, dated 24/11/2021 and 15/11/2021](#)', 3 December 2021

²⁸ European Commission, '[Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)', accessed 7 December 2021.

²⁹ NATO, '[Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)', 25 August 2021.

³⁰ *Moscow Times*, '[Russia warns retaliation if Bosnia joins NATO](#)', 19 March 2021.

³¹ Ian Traynor, '[Bosnia in worst crisis since war as Serb leader calls referendum](#)', *Guardian*, 28 April 2011.

³² Eldin Hadzovic and Drazen Remikovic, '[Bosnia: Dodik agrees to drop disputed referendum](#)', *Balkan Insight*, 13 May 2011.

³³ Eleanor Rose, '[Bosnian Serbs defy state with referendum landslide](#)', *Balkan Insight*, 25 September 2016.

³⁴ Reuters, '[US imposes sanctions on Bosnian Serb nationalist leader Dodik](#)', 17 January 2017.

In August 2018, Dodik disputed the findings of a 2004 report on the Srebrenica massacre in a speech to the Republika Srpska parliament.³⁵ The parliament subsequently voted to reject the report.

3.3 2018 general elections

Elections were held in BiH in October 2018 for the collective presidency as well as the national and entity governments. Following the election, the three members of the collective presidency were declared as follows:³⁶

- Šefik Džaferović of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), was declared as the Bosniak member of the presidency, holding this office for the first time.
- Željko Komšić of the Democratic Front (DF) was declared as the Croat member of the presidency. Komšić was first elected as the member of the collective presidency in 2006. He left office in 2014 but returned to office in 2018.
- Milorad Dodik was declared as the Serb member of the presidency.

3.4 Ban on genocide denial

In July 2021, the outgoing High Representative, Valentin Inzko, introduced a ban on genocide denial related to the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.³⁷ In the same month, Bosnian Serb political representatives said they would boycott state-level BiH political institutions in response to the new law.³⁸ Republika Srpska's National Assembly passed legislation on 30 July 2021 not to apply the law.³⁹ On 8 October 2021, the Republika Srpska Government passed a law obliging authorities across the entity not to implement the new state-wide law on genocide denial.⁴⁰

3.5 New High Representative

The current high representative is Christian Schmidt, a former minister in the German Government.⁴¹ Mr Schmidt took office in August 2021 following the resignation of the former high representative, Valentin Inzko.⁴² His appointment was challenged in the UN Security Council by Russia and China.⁴³ Both countries oppose the continuation of the Office of the High Representative.

³⁵ Deutsche Welle, '[Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik disputes 1995 Srebrenica genocide](#)', 14 August 2018.

³⁶ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, '[Bosnia and Herzegovina, general elections, 7 October 2018: final report](#)', 25 January 2019, p 24 and Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, '[Biographies](#)', 12 May 2018.

³⁷ Associated Press, '["It's getting out of hand": genocide denial outlawed in Bosnia](#)', *Guardian*, 24 July 2021.

³⁸ Deutsche Welle, '[Bosnian Serbs threaten to block country's major institutions](#)', 27 July 2021.

³⁹ Aljazeera, '[Bosnian Serbs reject imposed ban on genocide denial](#)', 30 Jun 2021.

⁴⁰ Radio Free Europe, '[Bosnian Serb entity's president reverses international overseer's ban on genocide denial](#)', 13 October 2021.

⁴¹ Office of the High Representative, '[High Representative](#)', accessed 6 December 2021.

⁴² Eurativ, '[US ambassador to BiH: we support High Representative Schmidt](#)', 2 June 2021.

⁴³ United Nations, '[Security Council turns down resolution that would end powers of Bosnia and Herzegovina High Representative](#)', 22 July 2021.

Following Schmidt's appointment, Dodik said the new high representative was not properly chosen and Republika Srpska "will not respect anything [he does]".⁴⁴ In March 2021, during a speech to Republika Srpska's parliament, Dodik called for the Office of the High Representative to be disbanded.⁴⁵ On 10 November 2021, ambassadors of the Steering Board of the PIC issued a joint statement supporting the work of the High Representative.⁴⁶ However, Russia, who is a member of the Steering Board of the PIC, said it did not support this statement.

3.6 Republika Srpska's threatened withdrawal from state institutions

On 8 October 2021, Dodik said Republika Srpska would take measures to withdraw from the BiH army, judiciary and its tax system.⁴⁷ However, he said this would not threaten BiH's territorial integrity. On 14 October 2021, Dodik made a further statement confirming that Republika Srpska would take measures to withdraw from BiH state institutions.⁴⁸

Speaking in a television interview, Dodik said he did not want there to be a war in BiH.⁴⁹ He also said he was confident that the EU would not impose sanctions on the Republika Srpska Government. However, he said Republika Srpska was ready to declare independence and to use force if necessary. He also said that Republika Srpska would be able to rely on the support of "friends" if it chose to become independent, without specifying who he was referring to. He said:

[...] we will defend ourselves with our own forces. If it happens that they say NATO will intervene, we will ask our friends—who told us clearly and loudly they never abandon their friends—to help us.⁵⁰

Željko Komšić, the Croat member of the BiH presidency, has said the proposed withdrawal of Republika Srpska from BiH state institutions had no basis in BiH law or the BiH constitution.⁵¹ Šefik Džaferović, the Bosniak member of the BiH presidency, has accused Dodik of threatening the territorial integrity of BiH and attempting to destroy BiH state institutions.⁵²

3.7 Autumn 2021 high representative report

In November 2021, Christian Schmidt published his first report as high representative.⁵³ Schmidt wrote BiH currently faced its greatest existential threat since the end of the Bosnian war. He criticised Dodik and the Government of Republika Srpska, saying their recent actions challenged the

⁴⁴ Reuters, '[New peace envoy gets hostile reception from Bosnian Serb leaders](#)', 2 August 2021.

⁴⁵ Danijel Kovacevic, '[Bosnian Serb Parliament says "no" to new High Representative](#)', *Balkan Insight*, 10 March 2021.

⁴⁶ Office of the High Representative, '[Joint statement by the ambassadors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board](#)', 10 November 2021.

⁴⁷ Reuters, '[Serbs say they will pull their region out of Bosnia's army, judiciary, tax system](#)', 8 October 2021.

⁴⁸ Reuters, '[Secessionist leader says Serbs will undo Bosnia state institutions](#)', 14 October 2021.

⁴⁹ Željko Trkanjec, '[Dodik: EU Commission will not sanction Republika Srpska](#)', Euractiv, 15 October 2021.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *Sarajevo Times*, '[Komsic: The entire RS could pay the price for Dodik's madness](#)', 10 October 2021.

⁵² *Sarajevo Times*, '[Dzaferovic: This is the most dangerous crisis in BiH, if there is no Dayton, the entities will disappear](#)', 10 October 2021.

⁵³ Office of the High Representative, '[60th Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations](#)', 5 November 2021.

fundamentals of the Dayton agreement. He described the plans announced by Dodik to withdraw from BiH state institutions as “tantamount to secession without proclaiming it”.⁵⁴

The report identified other challenges to the continued stability of BiH. He noted the other entity in BiH, the Federation of BiH, had yet to form a new government since the 2018 general election. He also described the institutions of BiH as having become “utterly stagnant”.⁵⁵

4. International response to current instability

4.1 US, EU and NATO

In a meeting between Dodik and Gabriel Escobar, US special envoy to the Western Balkans, in October, Escobar said the US would impose further sanctions if the Government of Republika Srpska sought to undermine BiH state institutions.⁵⁶ On 20 October 2021, Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State issued a joint statement on the Western Balkans.⁵⁷ In this statement, they said the EU and the US were united in their support for the territorial integrity of BiH. The statement also called on all parties to respect and protect state institutions and resume dialogue.

On 15 November 2021, the EU Foreign Affairs Council issued a further statement stating the EU’s support for the unity of BiH, urging Bosnian leaders to resume dialogue.⁵⁸ On 1 December 2021, following the meeting of NATO ministers in Riga, Latvia, Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, stated the alliance’s continued support for the integrity of BiH.⁵⁹

4.2 Russia

In August 2021, the Russian Government said it supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH.⁶⁰ It has criticised the appointment of the current High Representative and has called for the Office of the High Representative to be abolished. On 3 November 2021, Vassily Nebenzia, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, criticised the High Representative’s Autumn 2021 report, describing it as a “Serb-phobic” document.⁶¹

Dodik met with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, during a visit to Moscow in December 2021.⁶²

⁵⁴ Office of the High Representative, ‘[60th Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations](#)’, 5 November 2021.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Zeljko Trkanjec, ‘[Dodik to US envoy Escobar: f**k the sanctions!](#)’, Euractiv, 4 October 2021.

⁵⁷ European External Action Service, ‘[Western Balkans: joint statement following the meeting of High Representative Josep Borrell and Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#)’, 20 October 2021.

⁵⁸ Council of the European Union, ‘[Outcome of the Council Meeting: 3826th Council meeting: Foreign Affairs, Brussels, 15 and 16 November 2021](#)’, November 2021.

⁵⁹ NATO, ‘[Closing press conference](#)’, 1 December 2021.

⁶⁰ Russian Embassy, ‘[Russia’s position at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly](#)’, 4 August 2021.

⁶¹ Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, ‘[Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at UNSC briefing on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)’, 3 November 2021.

⁶² Radio Free Europe, ‘[Bosnian Serb leader meets with Putin for talks on gas, Balkan Issues](#)’, 2 December 2021.

The Russian Government said that the main focus of this meeting was the gas price in Republika Srpska and the potential for extending gas pipelines into the entity.⁶³ It also confirmed the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina was discussed. The Russian Government has not published further details of what was discussed at this meeting.

4.3 UK Government response

The UK Government has stated its support for the Dayton agreement and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of BiH. On 25 October 2021, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative) tabled a written question, asking the Government what assessment it had made of the integrity of the territory of BiH.⁶⁴ He also asked the Government what steps it was taking to preserve the Dayton agreement and help improve the lives of the citizens of BiH. Responding on 3 November 2021, Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, said the Government took seriously any talk of secession and other threats to the Dayton agreement. He said the UK Government continued to support both the EU's military mission in BiH and the Office of the High Representative. On the issue of governance in BiH, Lord Goldsmith said:

We continue to help the people of BiH build a better future in a stable and prosperous State with strong, functioning institutions. Ultimately, the authorities in BiH themselves must make necessary reforms for the good of all citizens, and we call on them to meet their obligations to those who elected them.⁶⁵

On 3 November 2021, Sonia Farrey, the UK political coordinator at the UN, said the UK Government continued to support the work of the High Representative.⁶⁶ She welcomed Mr Schmidt's first report which she described as "candid". She said the UK shared the concerns of other members of the UN Security Council regarding the "divisive rhetoric and actions pursued in some quarters of Bosnia and Herzegovina, notably by representatives of the Republika Srpska entity". She also stated the UK's continuing support for the Dayton agreement and the sovereignty of BiH.

On 9 November 2021, Anthony Mangnall (Conservative MP for Totnes) asked an urgent question on BiH and the potential of a renewed conflict in the Western Balkans.⁶⁷ James Cleverly, the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, restated the Government's support for the Dayton agreement, the work of the High Representative and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of BiH. Mr Cleverly directly criticised Dodik for threatening to withdraw Republika Srpska from state institutions. He described this threat as:

[...] a dangerous and deliberate attempt to distract from a failure to improve standards of living and to tackle corruption. It is unacceptable.⁶⁸

⁶³ Russian News Agency, '[Kremlin spokesman confirms Putin received Milorad Dodik in Kremlin](#)', 3 December 2021.

⁶⁴ House of Lords, '[Written Question: Bosnia and Herzegovina: politics and government](#)', 3 November 2021, HL3371.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, '[Threats to re-establish Republika Srpska army risk undoing Dayton agreement](#)', 3 November 2021.

⁶⁷ [HC Hansard, 9 November 2021, cols 175–85.](#)

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, col 175.

This urgent question was repeated in the House of Lords on 10 November 2021.⁶⁹ Lord Collins of Highbury, the Shadow Spokesperson in the Lords for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and International Development, asked Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth, whether he agreed that the re-establishment of a Republika Srpska army threatened by Dodik constituted a “red line” which must not be crossed.⁷⁰ Lord Ahmad said the Government believed Dodik’s recent comments about withdrawing from state institutions were undermining the Dayton agreement and he needed to cease making these statements.

On 24 November 2021, the chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Tugendhat, wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Elizabeth Truss, asking what actions the Government was planning to take to prevent conflict in the region.⁷¹ In terms of conflict prevention, Ms Truss said the Government was working through its embassy and the UK presence in NATO HQ in Sarajevo to promote security and prosperity in BiH. She said the UK left open the possibility of imposing sanctions to counter what she described as anti-Dayton activities. However, she said the Government would not speculate on who or what the future targets of such sanctions would be, in order not to reduce their impact if they were imposed.

Mr Tugendhat asked the Government in his letter what its assessment was of Russia’s objectives in the Western Balkans. He also asked what the Government was doing to mitigate Russia’s influence in the region. Ms Truss said the UK was observing a “concerning pattern of Russian behaviour” which she said aimed to hamper the Euro-Atlantic integration of countries in the Western Balkans.⁷² She said the Government would continue to pursue the policies towards Russia set out in the Integrated Review⁷³ and to work with partners to oppose Russian aggression.

On 1 December 2021, Lord Ahmad and Baroness Goldie, a Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence, met with ministerial counterparts and the high representative during a visit to BiH.⁷⁴ During this visit, they discussed the safeguarding of BiH’s sovereignty. Representatives of the UK Government and members of the UK Parliament also met with the high representative during his subsequent visit to the UK.⁷⁵

On 2 December 2021, the Government announced the appointment of Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach as the UK’s Special Envoy to the Western Balkans.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ [HL Hansard, 10 November 2021, cols 1755–8.](#)

⁷⁰ *ibid*, col 1756.

⁷¹ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, [‘Correspondence with the Foreign Secretary relating to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the future of the Dayton Accord, dated 24/11/2021 and 15/11/2021’](#), 3 December 2021.

⁷² *ibid*.

⁷³ Further information on the recent Integrated Review is provided in the House of Lords Library briefing, [‘Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’](#), 16 April 2021.

⁷⁴ Matt Field, [‘The United Kingdom’s enduring commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina’](#), 1 December 2021, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Blog, 1 December 2021 and [HC Hansard, 2 December 2021, col 1120.](#)

⁷⁵ House of Lords, [‘Written Question: Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina’](#), 30 November 2021, HL4333.

⁷⁶ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [‘UK announces new Special Envoy to the Western Balkans’](#), 2 December 2021.

4.4 House of Commons debate

The House of Commons debated the following motion moved by Alicia Kearns (Conservative MP for Rutland and Melton) on 2 December 2021:

That this House notes the concerning political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina; expresses its support for institutions set out in the Dayton peace agreement, and the office and work of the High Representative, Mr Christian Schmidt; and supports continued efforts by the UK Government and its allies to ensure peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to uphold the provisions of the Dayton peace agreement.⁷⁷

Ms Kearns, the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on BiH, urged MPs to support the motion.⁷⁸ She argued the debate gave them the opportunity to show their support for the maintenance of peace and human rights in the Western Balkans. She described the Dayton agreement as the foundation of a fragile peace which has been sustained in BiH since 1995. She criticised Dodik, accusing him of putting the Dayton agreement under “enormous strain”.⁷⁹ She also accused him of pursuing a “shameful and insidious campaign of genocide denial and glorification of war criminals”.⁸⁰ She argued one of the reasons why BiH faced the current threats to its territorial integrity was a lack of push-back by the international community to secessionist politics in the past. She called on the UK Government and the EU to impose sanctions against Dodik and his supporters in Republika Srpska. She also criticised those countries who had supported Bosnian Serb separatists, which she said included Russia, Serbia, China, Hungary and Slovenia.

Bob Stewart (Conservative MP for Beckenham), a former commander of UN forces in Bosnia, also spoke during the debate.⁸¹ He said that the territorial integrity of BiH should be maintained, argued there was pressure from both Serbs and Croats in the Western Balkans to divide Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia. He also said, while there had been peace in BiH since the signing of the Dayton agreement, the settlement had created a weak central government. He argued there needed to be renewed international action to establish a new political settlement, which he described as “Dayton II”. He said the Bosnian Serbs needed to be present in these negotiations if any new political settlement was to be reached.

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour MP for Bolton South East), the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Srebrenica, told the House allowing the secession of Republika Srpska from BiH would embolden those seeking to exploit ethnic tensions in the region.⁸² She also argued, were Republika Srpska to secede, this would permanently entrench borders that Bosnian Serb forces attempted to establish during the Bosnian War through a campaign of “forced deportation, torture and mass murder”.⁸³

⁷⁷ [HC Hansard, 2 December 2021, cols 1082–123.](#)

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, col 1082.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*, cols 1088–90.

⁸² *ibid.*, cols 1094–5.

⁸³ *ibid.*, cols 1117–19.

Catherine West, the Shadow Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said the international community needed to prevent any return to conflict in BiH.⁸⁴ She asked the Government if it would condemn the role taken by Russia who she accused of destabilising BiH. She asked the Government to confirm what the role of the newly announced UK Special Representative to BiH would be. She also asked the Government to confirm what action it was taking to promote trade with BiH and support civic society.

Wendy Morton, the Minister for Europe and Americas, said that the Government viewed the situation in BiH with “significant concern”.⁸⁵ She described Dodik’s proposals to withdraw from BiH state institutions as a “dangerous and deliberate” plan to “undo much of the hard-won progress of the past two decades”.⁸⁶ She restated the Government’s support for the high representative and said it would support the use of executive powers by the high representative should the situation require it. She told the House that the role of the UK’s special envoy would be as follows:

It will involve promoting strong democratic institutions and open societies, helping to tackle serious and organised crime and other joint security challenges, and encouraging resolution of legacy issues such as war crimes and missing persons.⁸⁷

She also told the House the Government would continue to support combating gender inequality and implement its preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative in BiH.

The motion was agreed to at the end of the debate without a vote.

4.5 Articles by members of the Lords

In an article for *House Magazine*, published in November 2021, Baroness Helic (Conservative) said that secessionists in Republika Srpska had been able to destabilise BiH and paralyse its institutions because the attention of the international community had been turned elsewhere.⁸⁸ She argued the UK should follow the lead of the US and impose sanctions on anyone trying to undermine the Dayton agreement. She said the UK should urge EU countries to do the same. She also argued the size of the EUFOR mission in BiH should be increased, arguing there were currently too few soldiers on the ground to successfully oppose secessionist forces if they had the support from Serbia and Russia.

Lord Hague of Richmond (Conservative), the former Foreign Secretary, writing in *The Times*, has also argued that the international community should not ignore what is happening in the Western Balkans.⁸⁹ He argued Dodik’s policy was to undermine BiH. He also said Russia was using Dodik as a means of undermining attempts by BiH to join NATO and the EU.

⁸⁴ [HC Hansard, 2 December 2021, col 1095.](#)

⁸⁵ *ibid*, cols 1119–22.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, col 1119.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, col 1120.

⁸⁸ Baroness Helic, ‘[We must not allow the western Balkans to slide back into conflict](#)’, *House Magazine*, 8 November 2021.

⁸⁹ Lord Hague of Richmond, ‘[If we falter the Balkans will explode again](#)’, *The Times* (£), 15 November 2021.

5. House of Commons International Development Committee Inquiry

On 1 December 2021, the House of Commons International Development Committee launched an inquiry into the UK Government's approach to atrocity prevention.⁹⁰ The terms of reference for the inquiry stated that it would focus on the situation in BiH as its case study.

⁹⁰ House of Commons International Development Committee, '[Inquiry seeks to prevent atrocities in Bosnia and beyond](#)', 1 December 2021.

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