



BOSNIA ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK:

The Potential for Violence and Steps to Prevent it

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Executive Summary

Russia is actively supporting indigenous political and paramilitary actors seeking to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Kremlin is cooperating with the Republika Srpska (RS) government of President Milorad Dodik to achieve this goal by violent means if necessary.

The most pronounced Russian intervention in Bosnia is in the RS security sector. With Russian support, RS police and security forces receive training and equipment similar to that of an army. In direct violation of the Dayton Peace Accords, the RS Ministry of Interior has procured numerous military-grade weapons over the past two years. Russian organizations such as the Night Wolves biker group, which played an active role in Crimea's annexation, are helping to form Serb nationalist paramilitary forces.

For the past few years, Russia has rapidly expanded its security and economic activity in the Western Balkans. Most brazen was the Kremlin-backed coup attempt in Montenegro in 2016, immediately before the country's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In Bosnia, Moscow has doubled-down on its support for Dodik in his secessionist aspirations. This backing, part financial and part political, includes other political actors in the country.

By supporting secessionist actors in Bosnia, Russia hopes to establish a client state in Europe, where it can damage NATO credibility and weaken the Transatlantic Alliance. If destabilized, Bosnia and neighboring Western Balkan states, such as Serbia, will be prevented from deeper integration with the West. An isolated and impoverished Bosniak state would be fertile recruitment ground for radical Islamist groups, which could threaten European security.

Russia views the Western Balkans as a part of its greater strategy of reshaping the international order to its liking. It has already shown willingness to use violence through proxies to prevent states in its immediate neighborhood from joining NATO and the European Union by occupying parts of Georgia and Ukraine. Western institutions like NATO deny countries with undefined borders membership. Hence, Russia supports efforts to divide Bosnia.

The United States and its NATO Allies should prevent the destabilization of the Balkan region with immediate and proactive reengagement, particularly with a reinforced security presence in Bosnia.

Russia's Strategy in the Western Balkans

The Russian government fears increased North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) presence on its borders as well as the growth of pro-Western engagements that may drive genuine democratic change in that country. A prime example was Russian President Vladimir Putin's response to Ukraine's deepening participation in the EU Eastern Partnership, which led to Russia's annexation of Crimea and sponsorship of civil war in the Donbass.

NATO's presence in the Balkans—a region Russia sees as in its sphere of influence—also causes alarm and reaction from the Kremlin. Hence, Russia supports efforts to prevent Balkan states from deeper integration with West. To this end, Russia's measures in the Balkans have varied from the proactive exercise of soft power to a 2016 coup attempt in Montenegro.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's fractured political and institutional landscape provides space for Russian intervention. The brutal 1992-95 war ended after United States intervened militarily and brokered the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords.¹ As a result, Bosnia has had over 20 years of peace that depends on political and security guarantees from the United States and the European Union. To counter U.S. and European efforts, Russia supports Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik, who has stated his intent to break up the Bosnian state repeatedly and is prepared to use violence if necessary.²

The combined deployment of Russian soft and hard power assets, together with its corruptive economic influence, weakens countries targeted by Russia and thereby limits the possibility for membership in Western institutions. As demonstrated in the orchestrated destabilizations of Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014), Putin maintains that a conflict-averse Europe and United States will not integrate states where political instability is persistent.

Gradual expansion and entrenchment of Russian

1 Bosnia and Herzegovina has one of the most complicated governance structures in the world. The state level government has limited competencies and is headed by a tri-member Presidency. Power largely rests in Bosnia's two entities (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the ten cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

2 As recently as February 2018, RS President Milorad Dodik stated that his goal is to secede from Bosnia. Barbara Surk, "Milorad Dodik wants to carve up Bosnia. Peacefully, if possible," *New York Times*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/world/europe/dodik-republika-srpska-bosnia.html>.



interests in Bosnia and its neighbors has coincided with the reduced role of the United States in the region, currently at a historic low since its intervention in the 1990s. The U.S. withdrew its peacekeeping forces in 2004, which was followed by a limited presence with the sole aim of capturing alleged war criminals. Facing other pressures in the Middle East and elsewhere, U.S. policy in the last decade has deferred to the EU in solving the region's problems.

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is the institution tasked with overseeing civilian implementation of the Dayton Accords to promote peace and stability in Bosnia following the 1992-95 conflict.³ Regrettably, the OHR has been marginalized due to lack of interest and coherent policy by leading EU member states. The absence of Washington and Brussels is being filled with domestic and foreign forces who seek a dysfunctional, failed Bosnian state. Taking steps in accordance with their obligations under the Dayton Accords the United States, the United Kingdom, and their NATO Allies can avert such an outcome.

Key to Russia's strategy is its exploitation of Pan-Slavic and Orthodox sentiments. By mobilizing these sentiments, the Kremlin forges common cause with ethnic Serbs throughout the Western Balkans. Widespread Serb nationalism, inherent to which is formation of a Greater Serbia state, affords Russian

3 For the governance of security forces and arms, see the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Annex 1-A, <https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/dayton/>.

agents a fertile ground for recruitment and support to its political and paramilitary activities. The successful organization and mobilization of ultra-nationalist Serb groups in RS and Serbia are a testament to their success in this ideology's employment.

Russia did not create pro-Serb militias in Bosnia, but it has exploited domestic cleavages for its own purposes. From World War II's Četniks to Arkan's Tigers of the 1990s, these groups' *raison d'être* and accompanying ideology is largely indigenous. Both were armed militias with a common streak for mass violence in the pursuit of an ethnically homogenous Serb state. Russia has seized the opportunity to destabilize Bosnia by transforming these groups into amorphous, multi-purpose entities. They can be mobilized politically for Dodik and his party. With extensive ties to locally dominant criminal clans, they can employ muscle against political opponents or corrupt state administrators and courts. When needed, local actors (or Russian agents) can mobilize these groups for violence, such as breaking up legal protests, organizing assassinations, or staging rebellions against the state, as was the case in Montenegro in 2016.⁴ Unchecked, these organizations could provoke a greater conflict in Bosnia.

Renewed conflict in Bosnia would be calamitous on three counts:

1. *NATO weakened.* Renewed interethnic conflict in Bosnia would represent a failure of Western efforts to stabilize the region over the last two decades. Consequently, NATO credibility as an effective European security force would be degraded.
2. *EU enlargement halted.* Renewed war would end the prospects of EU accession for Bosnia and Serbia, relegating their economies to stagnation and crony capitalism and weakening their democracies and governance. If EU enlargement stalled, these states would become more deeply indebted to Russia or other non-democratic actors such as Turkey. The end of Bosnia and Serbia's Western integration would leave an unstable and insecure Balkans, with a dramatic impact on European security overall.

⁴ Christo Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2. The Montenegro Zugzwang," *Bellingcat*, March 25, 2017, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/25/balkan-gambit-part-2-montenegro-zugzwang/>.

3. *Islamic extremist groups emboldened.* A divided and segregated Bosnia bodes poorly for American and European efforts to counter radical Islamic terrorism. Officially, Bosnia has the highest unemployment level of 15- to 24-year-olds in the world at 62.3 percent.⁵ Armed conflict or chronic instability would damage an already underperforming economy. Thousands of youths—especially Bosniaks—would be left jobless and disillusioned with the West, becoming prime candidates for extremist recruitment in the heart of Europe.

The Militarization of the Republika Srpska Police

In order to prepare for a future separation of the RS from Bosnia, President Dodik is arming and equipping RS police and related security forces with military-grade weaponry and training.

The RS is increasing its weapons cache rapidly. In recent years, the RS budget for weapons purchase has spiked.⁶ The RS government has purchased a total of over 4,000 automatic rifles over the last two years. In February, Dodik publicly recognized a recent RS purchase of 2,500.⁷ To place in context, the RS government had registered 851 long-barrel rifles in 2004. The firepower and sophistication of these weapons demonstrates the proactive militarization of RS police, which has 5,238 officers, according to official data.⁸ Currently, RS government is capable of arming roughly 75 percent of its police with a Kalashnikov-type firearm disproportionate to the basic police officer's protective duties.⁹

⁵ World Factbook, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html> (accessed March 1, 2018).

⁶ A comparison of RS budgets from FY2015-2017 demonstrates a nearly three-fold increase in budgetary allocation for the ministry's equipment procurement, from 1.5 million Bosnian KM in 2015 to 4.2 million Bosnian KM in 2016.

⁷ In February 2018, RS President Dodik publicly confirmed the purchase of 2,500 of 4,000+ assault rifles. Also noteworthy is Serbia's status as the top arms exporter to RS. "Dodik: Kupujemo 2.500 pusaka nema sta da krijemo" [Dodik: We're buying 2,500 rifles and there's nothing to hide], N1, February 12, 2018, <http://ba.n1info.com/a243007/Vijesti/Vijesti/Dodik-Kupujemo-2.500-pusaka-nema-sta-da-krijemo.html>.

⁸ According to RS Ministry of Interior 2015 records.

⁹ To date, Dodik and the RS government have spoken of its security service armament in the context of counter-terrorism, e.g. televised interview with Dragan Lukač on RTRS TV, March 7, 2018, <http://lat.rtrs.tv/av/pusti.php?id=75818>.



Srbska Cast – RS preparing for military parade, January 9, 2018.

Moreover, the total sum of assault rifles is likely larger, including pre-purchase totals and possible donations. For example, photographs taken at the RS government's public parade in Banja Luka, celebrating the self-styled, constitutionally illegal "RS Day" on January 9, 2018, show security officers carrying approximately 200 sub-machine guns not listed in recent procurement records.¹⁰

The RS is acquiring other types of weapons, too. Most alarming are reports of the RS government procuring Russian-manufactured anti-aircraft Igla 1-V missiles designed to be mounted on helicopters.¹¹ Tellingly, Dodik recently quipped that "neither American nor Russian rockets" can be found there.¹² The surprising statement was not prompted by any earlier discussion concerning RS acquisition of advanced anti-aircraft weaponry.

Russia has engaged with the RS security sector gradually, intensifying involvement since 2014. In 2015, RS security officials acknowledged cooperation with Russian security services.¹³ The following year, the RS Ministry of Interior and the Moscow police made

10 I.E. minimum 150 Brazilian Taurus SMT-9 (9 mm) and 49 Belgian FN SCAR-L (5.56 mm).

11 Interviews with Bosnian security officials, February 2018.

12 Radio and Television Srpska, "Dodik: U zaluzanima nema ni ruskih ni americkih raketa" [Dodik: There are no Russian nor American rockets at Zaluzani], RTS, February 18, 2018, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/3042673/dodik-u-zaluzanima-nema-ni-ruskih-ni-americkih-raketa.html>.

13 Erduan Katana, "Moskovski specijalci će obučavati policajce u RS" [Moscow specialists to train police in RS], Radio Free Europe, April 5, 2016, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/moskovski-specijalci-ce-obucavati-policajce-u-rs/27656303.html>.

a formal agreement for RS special police training.¹⁴ Since the agreement's signing, Russia has strengthened its security posture in RS. In April 2016, RS Minister of Interior Dragan Lukač acknowledged that Russian security services were providing training to RS police, "especially related to terrorism and breaking demonstrations."¹⁵ This development sufficiently alarmed the European Parliament to state that:

[The Parliament] is deeply concerned about statements made by the Interior Minister of the Republika Srpska about the future training of RS special police units in the Russian Federation, the deepening of cooperation, particularly regarding the exchange of information, and the intention to buy Russian military equipment.¹⁶

14 Erduan Katana, "Militarizacija policije RS kao mač i štit aktuelne vlasti" [Militarizing RS police as the sword and shield of the current government], Radio Free Europe, October 26, 2016, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rs-policija-rusija/28075680.html>.

15 News agency SRNA, "Lukač: MUP RS zainteresovan za nabavku oruzja iz Rusije" [Lukač: MUP RS is interested in procuring arms from Russia], *NI*, February 19, 2016, <http://ba.n1info.com/a82809/Vijesti/Vijesti/Lukac-rekao-da-je-MUP-RS-zainteresovan-za-nabavku-oruzja-iz-Rusije.html>.

16 News agency mondo.ba, "Evropu brine obuka specijalaca RS u Rusiji" [Europe is concerned with the training of RS specialists in Russia], Mondo, April 14, 2016, <http://mondo.ba/a649926/Info/Bosnia/Evropu-brine-obuka-specijalaca-RS-u-Rusiji.html>. See also, EU Parliament motion to wind up the debate on the on the 2015 Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015/2897(RSP)).

Srbska Čast and members of Veterans RS at the latter's headquarters in Banja Luka in January 2018.



At the same time, the RS has ramped up security cooperation with Serbia. In 2011, the RS government signed two memoranda of understanding with Belgrade's Ministry of Interior. These agreements thematically concern matters of police strengthening and rescue operations. The language they employ, however, may be interpreted to afford deeper levels of collaboration, particularly in respect to equipping and information-sharing beyond police affairs.¹⁷

Finally, the RS is improving its military infrastructure. Construction for new storage facilities adjacent to the Banja Luka airport at Mahovljani is scheduled to break ground in April 2018. Its planned size is strikingly disproportionate to the current commercial needs of this lightly trafficked airfield.¹⁸

Simultaneously, the former Yugoslav army barracks in Zalužani are being refitted as a "police training

center."¹⁹ Once completed, the enlarged barracks and adjacent facilities can serve up to 800 men. A new road will link this military base with the new storage facilities. Judging from the absence of populous or commercial areas between the two locations, its sole function is to serve as a transit corridor between them.²⁰ Thus, the potential delivery of Russian or Serbian weapons, equipment, or troops may be effectively covert. Moreover, these facilities and fields will afford expanded training grounds for RS security services, as well as for paramilitaries as needed.

A model for Zalužani is the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Niš, Serbia. Established in 2012, the Niš center's alleged purpose as a regional rescue training center is suspect at best. Underlying its thinly veiled military capacity, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić supports Russian requests that the center be afforded a status on par with the NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), thereby allowing Russian military personnel passage and diplomatic immunity.²¹ The presence of organizations such as Serb Honor (*Srbska čast*) in the center casts doubt on its purportedly humanitarian

¹⁷ Memorandum between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Interior of Republika Srpska on strengthening police co-operation (September 26, 2011) and Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Interior of Republika Srpska in the field of protection and prevention and management of emergency situations (December 16, 2011). Related are recent reports of the penning of an agreement between Serbia and Russia's FSB permitting the latter access to Serbian citizens' personal data. Maja Duric, "Sporazum sa "FSB – Rusija "viri" u srpske podatke I tajne" [Agreement with FSB - Russia 'viri' in state data and secrets], N1, March 12, 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/a371148/Vesti/Sporazum-sa-ruskom-sluzbom-obezbedjenja.html>.

¹⁸ Interviews with Bosnian security officials, February 2018.

¹⁹ News agency mondo.ba, "Evropu brine obuka specijalaca RS u Rusiji" [Europe is concerned with the training of RS specialists in Russia], Mondo, *ibid* fn 18.

²⁰ As of this writing, urban planning and zoning approvals for the road's construction are in process.

²¹ Zoran Glavonjic, "Ruski centar u Nišu - špijunskog ili humanitarnog karaktera?" [The Russian center in Nis – humanitarian or clandestine in character?], Radio Free Europe, June 16, 2017, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-rusija-ruski-centar/28558950.html>.

scope.²² In November 2017, U.S. Special Forces commander in Europe Gen. Ben Hodges told media that the center's humanitarian title was a "façade."²³

Given the possibility of violence around the October 2018 elections, large quantities of heavy weapons stored by the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina without continuous European Union Force (EUFOR) oversight are a matter of concern. There are around 1,200 pieces of decommissioned yet functional heavy weapons stored throughout the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the RS. This number excludes 300 tanks, most of which can be put to use within a week, if not sooner.²⁴ Additionally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has found that there are 749,366 firearms under illegal civilian possession, which indicates that in Bosnia every fifth citizen (19.5%) owns an illegal firearm.²⁵ In sum, there are more than sufficient light and heavy weapons for war in a state where violent unrest could rapidly spread.

Paramilitaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Russia supports groups engaged in paramilitary training in RS, as well as in Serbia. Indigenous in origin, these groups have three common denominators: they espouse extreme Serb nationalism, are vociferous in their overt pro-Russian sentiments, and were founded within the last six years. Their agenda aligns with that of the Serbian Orthodox Church, an ally vital to these groups, providing political-ideological endorsement and logistical support, and likely channeling funds from abroad

Even before 2016, Russia's presence in RS was noticeably on the rise. Ahead of general elections in October 2014, 123 Russian citizens arrived for a two-week stay in Banja Luka. The RS government presented the contingent as a Cossack folklore group,

22 Avdo Avdic, "SRBSKA ČAST: Zašto humanitarni radnici vježbaju gađanje u vojnom centru u Nišu?" [Srbska Cast: Why are humanitarian workers training at a military center in Nis?], *Zurnal*, January 12, 2018, <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/20919/zasto-humanitarni-radnici-vjezbaju-gadanje-u-vojnom-centru-u-nisu>,

23 "US general: Russian Center in Serbia is not humanitarian," *B92*, November 16, 2017, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=11&dd=16&nav_id=102822.

24 Senior Bosnian Armed Forces. Also, The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina own 124,025 individual weapons, which represents (9.97%) of the overall amount of small arms and light weapons in BiH.

25 Small Arms Survey, Center for Security Studies BiH, commissioned by UNDP, February 24, 2012, http://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/small-arms-survey-2010-2011.html.

but its lack of artistic skills left even ordinary citizens to suspect the group had another role to play ahead of political contests.²⁶ Since then, engagement between ultranationalist Serb organizations and veterans groups and their Russian counterparts expanded.

Many groups in the RS, including those mentioned above, are registered as nongovernmental organizations. Their composition ranges from war veterans to soccer fans to motorcyclists. Of the 78 nationalist organizations identified in the RS as part of this research, three such groups are pivotal to Russian ambitions: *Srbska čast* (Serb Honor), Veterans of Republika Srpska, and the RS branch of the Night Wolves, the Russian motorcycle gang.²⁷ Membership overlaps between these three groups, with members taking different roles in each organization. For example, a war veteran may simultaneously train in weaponry with *Srbska čast*, ride with RS Night Wolves, and march for Milorad Dodik's party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Below is a brief overview of the three:

- *Srbska čast* (*Serb Honor*) is an association of young, ethnically Serb males, formed and registered in Serbia in 2014 to promote "youth activism and mobilization for human rights and the environment."²⁸ Under the leadership of its founder Bojan Stojković, the group's pursuits thus far suggest other intentions.²⁹ *Srbska čast's* activities range from military training to anti-NATO political activism and counter-demonstration violence against democratic, pro-Western local activists.³⁰ Their alleged membership in Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro

26 Christo Gozev, "The Kremlin's Balkan Gambit: Part 1." *Bellingcat*, March 4, 2017, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/04/kremlins-balkan-gambit-part/>.

27 The identification of these groups was based on collective research undertaken with assistance of a Bosnian journalist with expertise in Serb nationalist organizations. Criteria for listing included physical and/or legal presence in the RS and divided into thematic categories based on their websites, social media presence, and related activities, as well as articles of registration when accessible.

28 *Srbska Cast* articles of registration, Niš, Serbia. September 19, 2014.

29 NB Stojkovic heads the Serbian SC in RS. Career criminal Igor Biblija leads the group.

30 Stojkovic began appearing in local media a few years ago and soon after was arrested for physically attacking audience members viewing the documentary, "Albanians are Our Sisters." Stojkovic further organized anti-NATO protests in Niš together with the NGO "Zavetnici." *Zavetnici* group member Nemanja Ristic is currently wanted by INTERPOL for his conspiratorial role in the November 2016 coup attempt in Montenegro.



Night Wolves – RS marching on the streets for Banja Luka for the “RS Independence Day” on January 9, 2018.

exceeds 40,000.³¹ A survey of the group’s photos and social media posts attests to an infatuation with guns, commando gear, ultra-nationalism, and idolization of war criminals such as Željko “Arkan” Ražnjatović, who led the Serb paramilitary “Tigers” in the 1992-1995 war. With its headquarters in Niš, *Srbska čast* maintains links with the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center based there.

- *Veterans of Republika Srpska* was founded in Doboj in 2012 by Duško Vukotić as a nongovernmental organization dedicated to advocacy and promotion of veterans’ interests, as stated in its articles of registration. The group’s affiliations (discussed below) indicate aims outside of civic engagement. For example, a related group, Descendants of the RS Veterans, serves as a pool from which Serb youths are recruited for military and political training.³² Closely allied with the Dodik government, the Veterans hold a special status that grants preferential access to RS public funds.³³ Since 2015, Veterans of RS is

an official affiliate of the aforementioned Russian veterans association, “Inheritors of Victory.”

- *Noćni vukovi* (*Night Wolves*) is a Russian motorcycle club with chapters in Serbia, Montenegro, and RS.³⁴ A de-facto criminal and extremist organization closely aligned with the Kremlin, the Night Wolves receive Russian state funds to promote an anti-Western and Pan-Slavic agenda at home and abroad.³⁵ Infamous for their paramilitary roles in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, the group and leader Nikolay Zaldostanov were placed under U.S., German, Canadian, and Polish sanctions for related activities. Saša Savić, the Wolves’ chief in the Western Balkans, participated as an insurgent in the Donbass.³⁶ Closer to home, several associates were connected with the failed

31 Angelka Markovic, “Osnivac ‘Srbska čast’ za N1: Udruženje broji 40.000 članova” [The founder of Srbska Cast for N1: The association has 40,000 members], N1, January 15, 2018, <http://ba.n1info.com/a237839/Vijesti/Vijesti/Osnivac-Srbske-cast-za-N1.html>.

32 Youth training video footage, Magazin Zurnal Online, January 25, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zA0yXdqPsow>.

33 Starting in 2016, VRS reportedly received tens of thousands of USD from the Ministry of Labor War Veterans and Disabled Persons’ Protection.

34 Yuliya Zabyelina, “Russia’s Night Wolves Motorcycle Club: from 1%ers to political activists,” Research Gate, October 3, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317569926_Russia’s_Night_Wolves_Motorcycle_Club_from_1ers_to_political_activists.

35 Peter Pomeratsev, “Forms of Delirium,” London Review of Books, October 10, 2013, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n19/peter-pomerantsev/forms-of-delirium>. See also, “The terrifying kids show staged by pro-Putin bikers and paid for by taxpayers,” Radio Free Europe, May 5, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-night-wolves-terrifying-kids-shows-putin-public-funds/26996590.html>.

36 Photo of Sasa Savic of Night Wolves - Serbia standing second from the right with Serbian mercenaries in Ukraine in 2014. Avdo Avdic, “Putinovi Noćni Vukovi: Za Obamu teroristi, za Dodika humanisti!” [Putin’s Night Wolves: For Obama’s terrorists, for Dodik’s humanists!], Zurnal, January 17, 2018. <http://zurnal.info/novost/20922/za-obamu-teroristi-za-dodika-humanisti>.

coup d'état in Montenegro in October 2016.

These groups aim to halt the integration of Western democratic institutions, economies, and values from deepening in Central and Eastern Europe. They intensify social divisions by seizing on nationalist sentiments, economic underperformance, socially conservative leanings, and skepticism of foreign agendas, whether from Brussels or Washington. They create new organizations and recruit members that can mobilize nationalist constituencies, demonstrate, or pick up arms, thereby giving space for the discontented to manifest their views.

Crucial to the RS groups' success is the confluence between their activities and those of their Russian counterparts. Politically, the two affirm their alliances through participation in demonstrations and militant parades and shared public appearances.³⁷ Attendant to these displays of mutual affection and strong cooperation are meetings with RS officials.³⁸ These gatherings are often accompanied by a show of official support and cooperation, such as designated affiliation, status, or award.³⁹

Their deeper, more permanent cooperation requires logistical and administrative facilitation. The Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Niš apparently serves this purpose, as evidenced by its links to

37 "Night Wolves – RS marching in the illegal January 9 'RS Independence Day' parade in Banja Luka on January 9, 2017," *Telegraf RS*, January 9, 2017, <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2554339-republika-Srbska-danas-obelezava-dan-rs>; "RS president Dodik with Sasa Savic together with Serbian and Russian Night Wolves in Visegrad, Bosnia, in 2016," *ATV*, June 28, 2014, <http://www.atvbl.com/putinovi-bajkeri-u-gradu-od-kamena/>; and again in 2017, Avdo Avdic, "Putinovo Noćni Vukovi: Za Obamu teroristi, za Dodika humanisti!" [Putin's Night Wolves: For Obama's terrorists, for Dodik's humanists!], *Zurnal*, January 17, 2018, <http://zurnal.info/novost/20922/za-obamu-teroristi-za-dodika-humanisti>.

38 RTV photo, "RS president Dodik with Serbian and RS Srbska Cast leadership in Banja Luka, Bosnia, on January 9, 2017," *RTVBN*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.rtvbn.com/mobile/vijest/3853260/ko-se-sve-druzi-sa-miloradom-dodikom>. See also, photo of RS parliament vice president Nenad Stevandić and VRS Dusko Vukotić meeting with General Valery V. Kaljakin of the Russia's Inheritors of Victory. Avdo Avdic, "Opasnost po Nacionalnu Sigurnost: Čelnicima Srbske časti zabranjen ulazak u BiH!" [Threat to national security: Leaders of Srbska Cast are barred from entering BiH], *Zurnal*, January 16, 2018. <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/20921/celnicima-srbske-casti-zabranjen-ulazak-u-Bosnia>.

39 *Ibid.* Another example was RS president Dodik's award to Zaldostanov for strengthening Serbian-Russian relations, Banja Luka, January 9, 2018, <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/20922/za-obamu-teroristi-za-dodika-humanisti>.

Srbska čast and Inheritors of Victory.⁴⁰ Similarly, the RS government in 2016 granted the Veterans of RS an office in Banja Luka and 60,000 KM (US\$ 37,500) from the RS budget. Particularly disconcerting is the reported provision of RS government properties to Zaldostanov's Night Wolves to be "available for its needs" vis-à-vis the October 2018 elections.⁴¹

These spaces may facilitate the planning and execution of paramilitary activity. According to several sources from the Bosnia security community, *Srbska čast* members received military training in properties owned by the Russian tycoon Rashid Serdarov in Eastern Bosnia. "Train-the-trainers" programs were allegedly conducted by the former FSB officials.⁴² Shooting and other military readiness training also occurs on Serbian special forces training grounds adjacent to the Humanitarian Center in Niš. This cooperation led to programs such as riflery and survival trainings in Russia for Serb war veterans' teenage children, where they are further able "to learn the Russian language, spirituality, national history and culture."⁴³

Through the collective efforts of the current RS government, Russian agents, and ultranationalist Serb groups, Dodik is capable of mobilizing thousands of supporters. They may be employed as protestors, counter-demonstrators, or as security forces supplementary to the RS police. This research team estimates their number at several thousand, at least 2,500 of whom are armed and have undergone military training. Their loyalty to Dodik and, by

40 For example, the June 2016 photo of a meeting at the Nis Center between VRS Vukotić, CS Stojković, and Inheritors of Victory Kaljakin. RS government donated VRS administrative office space in Banja Luka despite the organization's NGO classification at this meeting. Avdo Avdic, "Zasto humanitarni radnici vjexbaju gadanje u vojnom centru nisu" [Why do humanitarian workers practice firing at a military center in Nis?], *Zurnal*, January 15, 2018, <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/20919/zasto-humanitarni-radnici-vjexbaju-gadanje-u-vojnom-centru-u-nisu>.

41 The officiation of these offices is planned for March 21, 2018, coinciding with a planned Night Wolves tour of Serbia and RS that month. Avdo Avdic, "Ruta Ruski Balkan: Putinovi Noćni vukovi dolaze u Bosnu i Hercegovinu!" [Russian-Balkan Route: Putin's Night Wolves come to Bosnia and Herzegovina!], *Zurnal*, March 9, 2018, <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/21010/putinovi-nocni-vukovi-dolaze-u-bosnu-i-hercegovinu>.

42 Their presence in RS dates from October 2014, during the aforementioned "Cossack" visit in Banja Luka.

43 From the website for the Association of Participants in the Armed Conflicts of the Former Yugoslavia, which includes video of youth trainings; <http://www.uosyu.org.rs/rusija-2018/> (accessed February 6, 2018).

extension, his Russian partners is considered staunch.⁴⁴

Russia's Economic Footprint

For over a decade, Russia's economic presence has expanded in Bosnia, and particularly in the RS. From 2008 to 2016, Russian FDI in Bosnia increased from 235 million to 547 million USD.⁴⁵ Russia is Bosnia's sole natural gas supplier, while Russian firms control the country's oil refineries.⁴⁶ Over the past year, Russian interests sought to expand into the metallurgical sector, as indicated by reports of its impending takeover of Mittal iron mine in the RS.⁴⁷

Most recently, the Russian state-controlled gas giant Gazprom's strategic partner in Croatia—*Prvo plinarsko društvo* (First Gas Association, PPD)—became the main energy supplier as well as co-financer for aluminum processor Aluminij Mostar. This new relationship between PPD (and Gazprom) and Aluminij is significant given the latter's annual revenues of approximately \$300 million dollars. Deeply indebted, the PPD's lifeline includes the purchase of Aluminij debt at a discounted rate that, according to an Aluminij director,⁴⁸ will likely be converted into shares. Both are clients of Russia's state-owned Sberbank.

Furthermore, PPD is now a 25 percent shareholder in the port of Ploče, Croatia. As the only Bosnian-Adriatic outlet, the port's railway to the Bosnia border is a crucial import-export route. Given the strategic nature of these holdings and Gazprom's position within PPD, a significant portion of the Bosnian economy is exposed to political manipulation.

Vital to Russian influence on Bosnia commerce and industry is the political cooperation of Bosnia's leading Croat nationalist party, *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* (Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ), led by

⁴⁴ Based on interviews conducted with local officials and journalists in February 2018.

⁴⁵ Center for the Study of Democracy Policy Brief No. 74, "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans," *European Security Journal*, February 20, 2018. www.csd.bg/fileSrc.php?id=23351.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "Ruski novac za Rusenje DNS-a" [Russian money for DNS cracking], RTVBN, May 12, 2017, <http://www.rtvbn.com/3888333/ruski-novac-za-rusenje-dnsa>.

⁴⁸ Aluminij holds debts of approximately \$120 million primarily for unpaid electricity to the state-owned energy company Elektroprivreda HZHB.

the current Bosnian tri-presidency member Dragan Čović. HDZ control of state-owned companies, especially in the area around Mostar, Bosnia, serves the party's attempts at rapprochement with Russia. In 2017, the Croat party pushed for the Council of Ministers' decision to remove tariffs on Russian non-alloyed aluminum, imported for processing at Mostar. The move came after considerable lobbying from the Russian and Croatian diplomatic corps, whose political and economic interests in Bosnia routinely overlap.

In return for HDZ support, the Russian government supports Čović's nationalist agenda. Specifically, Moscow backs HDZ efforts to change the country's election law.⁴⁹ HDZ seeks to prevent citizens in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina from voting equally with Croats in HDZ-dominated parts of the Federation that were ethnically cleansed during the war.⁵⁰ Russia does so despite the concerns of Western officials fearful that the proposed amendments would turn the Federation into ethnically-defined electoral units.⁵¹ Nonetheless, Russian Ambassador to Bosnia Petr A. Ivancov remains the sole foreign official, except for the Croatian government officials from Zagreb, to endorse HDZ demands, in part because Čović's political alignment with RS President Dodik on several fronts.⁵²

Recommendations for the West

The composite picture of these activities demonstrates the capacity for indigenous, non-democratic actors, acting with Russian support, to destabilize the Western Balkans before any further NATO expansion can occur. Russian-backed efforts to do so could be

⁴⁹ Bosnia's entities are distinct election districts. BiH Parliament has 42 members, of which 28 are elected from FBiH and 14 from RS. Furthermore, entity parliaments are elected from within entity election districts.

⁵⁰ Igor Spiac, "Bosnian Croats push to change election law," *Balkan Insight*, May 4, 2017, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/experts-slam-bosnian-croat-proposal-to-change-election-law-05-03-2017>.

⁵¹ HDZ used a similar pretext in the 2001 rebellion (*Samouprava*) that the international community had to put down with considerable force. See, Oscar Vera and Karmen Fields, "Criminalized Power Structures," in *Third Entity Movement*, ed. Michael Dziedzic (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

⁵² N.B. Čović has been the recipient of public praise from Ivancov on several occasions and was the only diplomat present at the former's Christmas reception. Avdo Avdic, "Aluminij na Ruski Pogon: Vijeće ministara ukinulo carinu na uvoz nelegiranog aluminija" [Aluminum on Russian Drive: Council of Ministers suspended customs duties on imports of unalloyed aluminum], *Zurnal*, December 27, 2017, <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/20873/vijece-ministara-ukinulo-carinu-na-uvoz-nelegiranog-aluminija>.

violent, particularly given the presence of paramilitary units and the abundance of easily available weaponry.

Russia's aim is to halt NATO and EU expansion in the Balkans. Should NATO's response to a renewed Balkan conflict lack cohesion and fortitude, such a response would also demonstrate NATO's ineptitude. Finally, it would likely sow further division within the two alliances over mutual understandings of common interests.

To prevent this outcome, NATO, the U.S., and the EU should:

- Commit one or two companies of U.S. armed forces to maintain ongoing presence and training of Bosnian armed forces in the Brčko District as soon as possible, through the October 2018 general elections and into 2019. This action may be taken in cooperation with the U.K., whose forces' status under EU Force Althea facilitates rapid deployment.⁵³
- Widen U.S. sanctions to include key RS state officials for their continued support of the illegal 2016 RS referendum, held in violation of the country's constitution and, hence, the Dayton Peace Accords, thus constituting not only a threat to the state's integrity, but also to its peace.⁵⁴
- Use the Magnitsky Act to sanction corrupt individuals in Bosnia.⁵⁵ The U.S. administration and Congress should encourage the EU to adopt similar sanctions.
- Cease all communications, training, and military and technological assistance to the RS Ministry of Interior and related entities by NATO member states immediately. Use EUFOR Althea mandate to prevent further militarization of the RS Ministry of Interior and spread of paramilitary groups in the

country.

Taken in sum, these measures are impactful and cost-effective. Combined, they would send a proportionately assertive message to leadership in Bosnia, Russia, and Serbia that the West remains invested in Bosnia and is watching. The political will required would be significantly less than that needed to build consensus after the crisis begins. For the strength of the Transatlantic Alliance and security of the Bosnian people, the return on these preventive measures stands to be manifold. 🌐

⁵³ European Union Force (EUFOR) Althea, successor to NATO's Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a multinational military deployment to Bosnia that oversees and ensures the implementation of the Dayton Agreement.

⁵⁴ An illegal referendum on the "National Day" of RS was held on September 25, 2016. It was soon after declared illegal by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia on the grounds that it discriminated against the non-Serb population of RS.

⁵⁵ In 2016, the U.S. Congress expanded the Act's provisions to sanction acts of significant corruption. See, the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, S.284, Sec. 3(a)(3), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/284/text> (accessed March 3, 2018).





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