

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Heightened tensions and destabilising risks after Serb entity's leader is sentenced to jail and barred from politics | Credendo

Event

On 26 February, Bosnia's top court sentenced Milorad Dodik, Republika Srpska's president ('RS' – the Serb majority entity of the Bosnian federation), to one year in jail and to a six-year ban from the RS presidency. Dodik was found guilty of failing to follow decisions of Christian Schmidt, i.e. the High Representative who oversees the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. While his lawyers appealed against the verdict which Dodik sees as politically motivated, Dodik himself opted for a confrontation with the RS opposition parties and Bosnian state institutions by pushing the RS parliament to adopt laws creating a separate RS legal system from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Early March, Bosnia's constitutional court suspended those RS laws and the Bosnian prosecutor's office issued an arrest warrant against Dodik and several RS lawmakers.

Impact

The court sentence and Dodik's reactions have sharply increased tensions in Bosnia's fragile political and institutional landscape. Recent laws adopted by the RS parliament – though not supported by the parliamentary opposition – are inflammatory as they would prevent state police and judiciary from being recognised and active in RS. RS institutions now face the dilemma of following RS or Bosnian state laws. Geopolitical risks are on the cards as well. The USA and EU, which are active players in ensuring order and stability in the country, criticised Dodik's moves but prefer to support a domestic legal solution for the time being. Meanwhile, the EU has deployed further EUFOR troops (the EU force mission operating in Bosnia). Future EU pressures on Dodik could be necessary as his past unambiguous separatist calls indicate he could seize the opportunity to accelerate the RS's effective secession from the Bosnian Federation. Dodik might also hope for a potential non-interventionist US stance from the Trump's administration in the future, while counting on traditional support from Serbia and Russia. Therefore, and although Dodik stressed he does not intend to fuel a conflict, future political developments will have to be closely monitored in the coming months as the latest legal infighting is a threat to the country's precarious political and security stability.

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