

Remembering Srebrenica  
The CIBA Building  
146 Hagley Road  
Birmingham B16 9NX

The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA

Copied to: Liz Truss, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of South Asia, the United Nations and the Commonwealth, in his capacity as minister responsible for atrocity prevention; Wendy Morton, Minister for Europe and Americas; Tom Tugendhat, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee; Sarah Champion, Chair of the International Development Committee

1 December 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as members and friends of the [UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group](#), which exists to cooperate, collaborate, and share knowledge to improve the UK's prediction and prevention of mass atrocities. We are deeply concerned about risks of violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina triggered by the inflammatory actions and rhetoric of the Bosnian Serb member of the Presidency, Milorad Dodik. We are alarmed by and reiterate High Representative Christian Schmidt's [assessment](#) that this crisis is "the greatest existential threat of the post-war period" for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are concerned that the UK's systems, capabilities and policies towards Bosnia and Herzegovina still lack a focus on atrocity prevention, grievance, and political marginalisation. Our expertise tells us that without cross-cutting and coordinated international responses that centre atrocity prevention, opportunities to mitigate risks of further deterioration and violence will more likely be missed.

December marks the 26th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which established the two-entity make-up of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a painful compromise to stop the war and to preserve a single state. Thus, the Bosnian-Serb majority entity Republika Srpska was established within Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a complicated system of power-sharing governance that includes a tripartite presidency, with a rotating chairmanship. Although many competencies were given to the entities, the Dayton Peace Agreement allowed for the establishment of other state institutions, which was successfully pursued over time.

In recent weeks, however, Mr. Dodik has announced that he will seek to withdraw Republika Srpska from many state institutions, including the Border Police, electricity transmission and judicial institutions (the State Court and Prosecutor's Office), Taxation Authority and even the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dodik intends to create parallel entity institutions including a newly organised version of the Army of Republika Srpska. These steps are tantamount to secession and directly undermine the Dayton Agreement.

The political instability is exacerbated as the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the other entity making up Bosnia and Herzegovina, has not had a government since the 2018 elections. Mr. Dodik's

political ally, the Bosnian-Croat nationalist party HDZ, has blocked the establishment of the entity government while demanding changes in electoral law that would ensure their permanent hold on power through electoral engineering, even though such changes would act as further division to the country and its communities.

Another factor in the political instability of the country is external interference, from Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbours, but also direct intervention from Russia, fuelling Dodik's secessionist drive.

The persistent denial of the Srebrenica genocide by Dodik and his supporters are deeply worrying signs of the ethnonationalism which underpinned the violence in the 1990s and fuelled hatred that led to crimes against humanity, genocide, and war. The risks to Bosniaks, especially the returnees to Republika Srpska, and vulnerable communities like Roma and Sinti, asylum seekers, LGBTQI+ people and others, require decisive action from the United Kingdom and the international community. Violent escalation has the potential to ripple throughout the Western Balkans and in particular Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, which are all experiencing ongoing political crises and where Russian interference contributes to instability.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a key player in NATO and a state which aspires to be a force for good in the world, HMG is well placed to lead by example. We welcome the UK's [intervention](#) supporting the Office of the High Representative and EUFOR during the Security Council Briefing on Bosnia Herzegovina. At the NATO Meeting of Defence Ministers meeting in Brussels, as well as at upcoming United Nations Security Council and Human Rights Council meetings, the UK should continue voicing its commitment to the Office of the High Representative and supporting the stability, democracy and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina by raising the worrying developments of the Republika Srpska leadership.

The UK should also call on the EU to strengthen the EUFOR stabilisation force and to ensure the military presence is substantial enough to deter further political escalation that could spiral into violence, and increase its presence at the NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo. The UK could also consider holding joint bilateral military exercises with the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a demonstration of their strong partnership. The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina have successfully served with NATO allies, including the UK, in Afghanistan and Iraq. Decisive international action has helped to diffuse tensions during a similar crisis [in 2001](#) when the self-styled Croat National Congress declared self-rule in Croat-majority areas. The UK should lead the response needed in 2021.

The UK's leadership in the face of this crisis is needed and the Embassy team should be properly resourced to centre atrocity prevention thinking and strategy within its policy and programming. Lessons can be learnt from other UK country teams such as Myanmar where important changes have been made to monitoring and communicating risks and creating a role with responsibility for coordinating atrocity prevention matters.

The responsibility to protect vulnerable populations from identity-based violence begins at home. The FCDO should ensure it communicates its analyses across government, including to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as members of the Bosnian-British community are reliving their trauma and fear for what an escalation of violence might mean for loved ones in the Balkans. The UK Government should be proactive in reaching out to and working together with Bosnian-British communities through organisations like Remembering Srebrenica.

While the responsibility to prevent the gravest of crimes from occurring is shared by all states, the United Kingdom is uniquely positioned to bring essential global leadership to diffusing tension and supporting a safer, more unified Bosnia and Herzegovina. The UK must do its part to ensure the violent, dark days of the 1990s do not return.

Sincerely,

Aegis Trust

European Centre for  
the Responsibility to Protect

Ishami Foundation

Jo Cox Foundation

Korea Future

Protection Approaches

Remembering Srebrenica

Rights for Peace

Sri Lanka Campaign  
for Peace and Justice

United Against Inhumanity

United Nations Association - UK

Videre Est Credere

Waging Peace

