



NATO Foundation  
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### **A referendum threatens the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In 1992 the process of dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was started with the independence of Slovenia and the war in Croatia was underway. Given the peculiar ethnic and geographical shape of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1992 Radovan Karadžić and the Serbian members of the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared unilaterally the birth of the Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Republika srpskog naroda Bosne i Hercegovine*) it appeared clear that Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) was designed to be the next theatre of the Yugoslav wars of dissolution. Nevertheless, since that moment, the day of the declaration of independence has always been celebrated as a national holiday for the Serbs of BiH.

On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2016 the citizens of the Republica Srpska were called to vote for a referendum related to the recognition of the 9<sup>th</sup> of January as a national holiday. As expected, according to the authorities, the 99,79% of voters said “yes”. This referendum, as well as apparently related to a secondary issue, can have a potential destabilizing effect of the fragile equilibrium in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

First of all, the referendum was opposed by the Bosniaks and the Croats because considered discriminating, but also the government of Sarajevo said that the referendum was “illegal and unconstitutional” following the decision of the Constitutional Court to ban the referendum. Despite the opposition, Bosnian-Serb President Milorad Dodik defended the referendum saying that it would go down in history as the “day of Serb determination”. The challenge of Dodik against the central government and all the national authorities has already damaged the relations among the ethnic groups

of the country, and in the worst scenario could also bring to a secession referendum in the future, with dangerous repercussions on the chain of command of the BiH armed forces.

The threat against the weak balance of power institutionalized with the Dayton Agreement is growing. Bosnia-Herzegovina remains a fragile country and a possible point of instability in the core of the Balkans. As a matter of fact, while the serbian PM Aleksandar Vučić did not back Republika Srpska referendum (affirming that Serbia's policy was one of respect of the territorial integrity of BiH), on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September Putin hosted Dodik and affirmed that Russia defends the right of the Republika Srpska to hold the referendum.

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