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Letter to Secretary Blinken

Bosnian-Herzegovinian American Academy of Arts and Sciences

November 12, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to you on behalf of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian American Academy of Arts and Sciences, an organization assembling more than 250 university professors, scientists and researchers, medical doctors, artists and literary figures, who have found refuge and achieved enormous academic success and public recognition in the United States and North America during and after the wars in the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s. We write as concerned citizens of the United States as much as scholars still attached to their homeland in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We write because, once again, as in the 1990s, the threats to sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and political rejection of its multiethnic fabric pose a potentially violent challenge to people's lives and livelihood in the Western Balkans but also to the future of Europe and the transatlantic relations.

We write to you, Secretary Blinken, to urge you to act before Europe sleepwalks into another war. Despite obvious political provocations and actions undermining the complex institutional structure built on the basis of the Dayton Peace Agreement, Serb but also Croat ethno-nationalist leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and in Serbia and Croatia proper) are still accepted as negotiating partners and their secessionist or expansionist dreams are emboldened.

Milorad Dodik is creating a separatist army in Republika Srpska. Serbia is using the Open Balkan Initiative as a cover for the transfers of arms to Dodik. Dragan Čović is openly advocating for a "third entity" in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And the politicians in Zagreb are now united behind revisionist histories of World War II and transparent treatment of "Croat Herzegovina" as a part of their own state. Bosniak leadership is weak and, once again, unarmed and dependent on outside support.

These are the same political dynamics that led to the war in 1992. And they are not just allowed to fester but empowered through the combination of the EU neglect of the region and the unopposed geopolitical interferences by Russia and China. As a result, the states and the peoples of the Western Balkans are now peons in the hands of the great powers, cheap properties traded on a reused Monopoly Board by players whose actions they cannot control. Given the increases in military expenditures and

the rush to rearm, the circumstances in the Balkans are beginning to eerily resemble the years before World War I.

Secretary Blinken, the peripheries are hardly the backwaters which fall apart due to their own inadequacies, they are the harbingers of the future. Serb and Croat war criminals are an inspiration to right-wing extremists from New Zealand to the United States. The reimagining of Europe as the white, Christian continent - as demanded by many EU leaders at the moment, and not just the right-wing fringe - cannot but play itself out violently in the European borderlands. And so, while we understand the delicate position that the United States finds itself in both domestically and internationally at this particular political moment, the time to prevent these dreams from turning into nightmares is now. Bosnia and Herzegovina can be reorganized according to democratic principles of multi-ethnic citizenship instead of the segregationist principles of ethno-territorial division. By stopping the drive to segregation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, you can send a strong signal that racism and white supremacy will be stopped elsewhere also.

We ask you to consider the following measures:

- Impose targeted economic sanctions on corrupt leaders who challenge Bosnian and Herzegovinian sovereignty and constitutional order and urge the EU to do the same;
- Isolate and sanction all political leaders who engage in genocide denial and revisionist history;
- Offer support to civil society leaders who have been actively fighting ethno-nationalist tendencies on the ground for decades;
- Dispatch the best US diplomatic team to the region;
- Reinforce the US commitments to NATO missions in the Western Balkans and protect the porous borders between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with additional NATO troops;
- Prioritize the peace and security of Bosnia and Herzegovina in public speeches and ask President Biden to do the same.

Respectfully,

On behalf of the BHAAAS Board Of Directors

Ismar Volić
BHAAAS President

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