

## **Bosnia: Explosive Leaks**

**Author:** [Nerma Jelacic](#)

Federation's secret police chief resigns as documents damaging to opposition party leak to media.

The intelligence service in the Federation - one of Bosnia-Herzegovina's two constituent entities - was in turmoil this week, as its head resigned in the wake of a bombshell story that his officers apparently leaked to the press.

The leaked story was soon confirmed by Bosnia's prosecution service, which announced that the Federation Intelligence Security Services, FOSS, had passed it material containing damaging allegations against a leading opposition politician, Social Democratic Party, SDP, chairman Zlatko Lagumdžija. He vigorously denied the accusations - that he was implicated in a series of explosions in the capital Sarajevo in early August - and urged prosecutors to find out who was behind them.

Bosnia's international administration, the Office of the High Representative, OHR, voiced concern at the leak. "OHR expects the Federation authorities to take the necessary steps to resolve this situation," spokesman Vedran Persic told a press conference on September 4. "Then we will consider our next move - should this be necessary."

"What BiH does not need - and what it must eliminate completely - are discredited and politicised intelligence operations, operating outside proper democratic control. Reform is imperative. It is imperative in order to protect citizens and it is imperative if Bosnia-Herzegovina is to become a modern, functioning democracy, fully integrated in Europe," said Persic.

He was speaking a day after FOSS director Ivan Vuksic said he was stepping down. Vuksic's announcement followed two days of press coverage of the allegations against Lagumdžija. Federation Prime Minister Ahmet Hadžispahić said on September 3 that there would be an official investigation into the leak, and that those responsible would be punished.

The latest developments will come as a shock to the international community, and especially to High Representative Paddy Ashdown, who sacked the previous FOSS chief Munir Alibabić in October last year precisely because "too many cases were being leaked to the media".

It is not clear who leaked the documents, which consist in large part of recorded telephone conversations. FOSS officially passed them to Federation prosecutors on September 1, and the public prosecutor's office issued a statement two days later saying the secret service had asked it to open an investigation into what was described as a coup plot. It said the material would be studied carefully before any decision on an investigation could be made.

According to prosecutors, FOSS believes that Lagumdžija and others were responsible for four explosions outside business and private addresses in Sarajevo in the first half of August. An investigation into the blasts themselves is already up and running.

Lagumdžija responded quickly to the allegations. On September 3, he sent an open letter to Federation chief prosecutor Zdravko Knežević placing himself at his disposal and waiving his own immunity as a member of parliament, in view of the seriousness of the allegations.

"Any well-informed and well-intentioned person will know that all these accusations are based on vicious

lies, and that their progenitors are provoking a situation which would bring them to face justice in court in any organized democratic state," Lagumdzija said in his letter. "It is necessary not just to initiate proceedings, but also to complete them by punishing the culprits."

He said that the investigation should begin with an examination of him and the party he leads, but that it should "continue and conclude with those who created such monstrous accusations".

Political analysts and experts were sceptical about the allegations that Lagumdzija would be involved in trying to bring down the government.

"This is a case of political foes settling old scores," Ozren Kebo, editor-in-chief of the independent weekly magazine Start, told IWPR. "It's absolutely clear to me who stands behind these claims. There is a strong current of intelligence and media forces, and they are involved in settling old scores with people they don't like.

"I am very, very doubtful that Lagumdzija and others were planning to bring down the government. I am sick of fabricated scandals, which are then served up for public consumption as prime-quality, genuine political scandals. This country is facing financial collapse and people are going hungry - it definitely does not need made-up scandals on top of everything else."

The view taken by Kebo and others in the media is that the latest allegations are part of a tit-for-tat game of political retribution between opposing factions. Whatever the truth of that claim, Lagumdzija is close to the previous FOSS chief, Alibabic, while Vuksic is part of the current coalition between the Bosnian Muslim Party of Democratic Action, SDA, and the Croatian Democratic Party, HDZ.

A Croat regarded as one of the HDZ's less compromising nationalists, Vuksic's appointment as head of FOSS raised a few eyebrows last year. He is due to appear in court in Sarajevo Cantonal Court on September 10, to face criminal charges unrelated to the present scandal. Some observers think that it was the upcoming court case, rather than the document leak, that prompted his resignation.

Vuksic is charged with complicity in an incident in April 2001, when Croat nationalist rioters briefly held a number of international peacekeepers hostage. The soldiers were raiding the Herzegovacka Banka branch in the town of Grude, on suspicion that it had channelled funds to Croat separatists seeking to establish their own mini-state in southern Bosnia.

IWPR called Vuksic's mobile phone on September 4, but there was no answer.

Vuksic is expected to enter a plea next week. Meanwhile, FOSS remains leaderless for the second time in less than a year.

While most people are waiting for the prosecutor to decide whether there is a case to answer in the FOSS documents, it is certain that the Federation government will come under heavy pressure to stop the leaks of confidential and potentially damaging information. As this issue of BCR went to print, the government was meeting in closed session, with FOSS the only matter on the agenda.

Nerma Jelacic is IWPR programme manager in Sarajevo.

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