

## **Bosnian Spooks Unite**

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Politicians in both entities have succumbed to international pressure to reform and merge their respective intelligence services.

Divided Bosnia is to get its first joint intelligence agency next year in a significant step towards the abolition of parallel systems in the country's two entities and the strengthening of central institutions, necessary for eventual accession to the European Union.

The new body will be formed through a fusion of the two agencies currently working in the Republika Srpska, RS, and the Federation.

Details of the plans will be presented over the next few days by Bosnia's top international mediator, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown.

Adnan Terzic, the state prime minister who launched the idea of a joint intelligence agency, described it as a logical step, after local and international officials recently agreed to establish a united defence ministry and impose centralised civilian control over the armed forces.

The international community supports both reforms. Julian Braithwaite, chief spokesman for the High Representative, said the West had invested a lot of money and effort in restructuring the army and police since the end of the Bosnian war, but that the intelligence services had so far escaped change.

"The intelligence services were not included in the reforms," he said. "They haven't undergone any serious transformation, but we know some of their members committed grave crimes, therefore their reform is necessary."

The intelligence agencies throughout former Yugoslavia played an important and largely negative role in the collapse of the old federal republic and the subsequent wars.

Most then became useful tools of the ruling nationalist parties before, during and after the wars, providing them with important information and also carrying out murky, clandestine operations.

Since the war ended, the agencies have all been involved in unsolved assassinations and other crimes, and it was only when the international community protested that local leaders were forced to regulate their affairs.

As a result, the Bosnian Croat SNS and the Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) AID agencies merged to form a joint intelligence organisation for the Federation, known as FOSS. Republika Srpska retained its own force, known as OBS.

However, the agencies continued to play an improper and often illegal role in politics, as a result of which Ashdown last year sacked the head of FOSS, Munir Alibabic – Munja, over frequent leaks of important secret documents to the press.

More recently, the Bosnian Serb member of the state presidency, Mirko Sarovic, was forced to resign after the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia, SFOR, discovered Serb intelligence officers were spying on international and local officials.

The espionage scandal was the last straw, prompting international officials to demand the radical reform of the intelligence agencies.

A source from the Office of the High Representative, OHR, said Ashdown would outline the package of reforms over the next few days.

The new, united agency, tentatively called BOS, for Bosnian Intelligence Service, is expected to start work by next January. In its first year, the head will be a foreign national from a country that has successfully completed its transition process and which is now joining European and Atlantic associations, such as NATO and the EU.

On account of the exceptionally successful transition of the Czech intelligence agency, some local and western officials want to see a Czech appointee.

During the transition period, FOSS and OBS staff will be screened for their suitability to work in BOS and retrained as professional intelligence officers, capable of serving the entire community, irrespective of their ethnic or religious background.

Ashdown will also announce the formation of a five-member expert team, charged with working out further details about BOS operations. One will be a foreign national while the others will come from the local intelligence agencies, two from each entity.

They will have until the beginning of September to define a legal framework for the new agency's activities before it starts next January.

Only few months ago, the very idea of such a step would have caused an uproar, especially from the Serbian side.

But under the pressure of the recent spate of scandals and growing evidence that parallel systems function poorly, local leaders appear to have accepted that reform of the defence, intelligence and other key structures is inevitable.

Braithwaite stressed that OHR and the rest of the international community would use all its authority to help lay the foundations of a professional service, which will break ties with the past and with the practices of party-run, semi-private, intelligence bodies.

Terzic told IWPR that the working group would define a secure legal framework for BOS within the given deadline. Draft legislation was already being "combed through" at several different levels, he said.

Other sources said this bill had been prepared by a group of professors from Sarajevo university's criminal faculty, drawing on the experiences of other, mostly Belgian and French, intelligence services.

"The Balkans are a transit route to Western Europe for organised crime," said Terzic, "and the mafia here operates at the regional level, so the setting up of BOS is one response to present security challenges."

The premier added that the growing global terrorist threat and the recent assassination of the Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic were additional incentives to proceed with the proposed reforms.

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