



THE POLITICAL PORTRAIT OF MILORAD DODIK: A HERO FOR BOSNIAN SERBS, A THREAT FOR OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

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Over the past year, the Bosnian political scene has been dominated by the leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), Milorad Dodik. Known for his secessionist actions and for protecting the rights and freedoms of the Bosnian Serb people, Milorad Dodik has undertaken the most concrete steps toward the secession of Republika Srpska (RS) from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In this context, following his first-instance conviction to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban on holding public office, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska (NARS) adopted a series of legislative measures aimed at increasing the RS autonomy and challenging the authority of the central institutions in Sarajevo on RS territory, with the entity moving toward secession. For the RS leader, Milorad Dodik, this was followed by a stressful period in which he faced the possibility of arrest at any moment by state law enforcement authorities. In response, he adopted enhanced security measures, including traveling by helicopter to avoid being blocked and arrested on land. Eventually, he resigned from the office of President of Republika Srpska, and early elections were organised, but the ban on holding public office for six years remained in force. The presidential elections in RS were initially won by the SNSD candidate, Siniša Karan, but voting will be repeated in several polling stations due to allegations of electoral fraud. Nevertheless, a reversal of the results is unlikely; at most, the margin between the SNSD candidate and the opposition candidate, Branko Blanuša, may be reduced. In such a scenario, this question arose: "Will SNSD leader Milorad Dodik remain at the forefront of the Bosnian political life after the general elections scheduled for the autumn of 2025?". Through logical deduction, this article aims to identify the main arguments that may help answer the question regarding Milorad Dodik's political future.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; political leader; Milorad Dodik; political portrait; Republika Srpska;

INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina) continues to be a state marked by political instability, posing security risks for the Western Balkans (WB) region and, implicitly, for Romania. Its state architecture (three levels of local administration), the decision-making system based on the three constituent peoples, excessive bureaucracy, interethnic tensions, and the lack of a common vision for state reform are just some of the reasons why the country requires ongoing international monitoring.

Throughout the past year (2025), the Bosnian political scene has been dominated by the actions of the president of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD, a Bosnian Serb party), Milorad Dodik (a Bosnian Serb). He came to power with international support in 1998, but gradually aligned himself with the ideas of illiberal democracies, particularly those promoted by the Russian Federation. His authoritarian rule has been marked by nationalist rhetoric¹, promoting the idea that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a dysfunctional state. Under these circumstances, Milorad Dodik is perceived, on the one hand, by the Bosnian Serb population as a “hero” who defends the rights and interests of Bosnian Serbs, and, on the other hand, by the Bosniak population as a threat (Huskić-1, 2025).

The political actions of the SNSD leader have been widely covered by the media, yet this coverage has reflected the interests of the actors controlling the major media outlets. On the one hand, pro-Western media portrayed Milorad Dodik in a negative light, highlighting the danger he poses to the stability of the Bosnian state. On the other hand, anti-Western media depicted the SNSD leader as a defender of the rights and freedoms of the Serbian people in the Western Balkans region and as an important vector for promoting Pan-Slavism in Europe. The year 2025 culminated in his removal from the position

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¹ Among them, the denial of the Srebrenica genocide, the promotion of anti-Western narratives, and challenges to the legitimacy of the Bosnian state (author’s note).



The article examines Milorad Dodik's political actions over the course of the past year, as well as the decisions taken by the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina that contributed to the removal of the RS president and the organisation of early elections.

of President of Republika Srpska (RS) and a six-year ban on holding public office. Following the early elections, a close associate of Milorad Dodik, Siniša Karan – former Minister of Development and Technology in the government led by Dodik – was elected to lead RS, with the SNSD retaining political control over the entity. The final election results have not yet been implemented, as, following complaints filed by opposition parties, the Electoral Commission decided to repeat the elections in several electoral districts where suspicions of electoral fraud had been raised (N1, 2025).

Under these circumstances, considering both the media portrayal and the actions of Milorad Dodik, the question arises as to whether the Bosnian Serb leader will leave the political scene in Republika Srpska (RS) after the general elections scheduled for 4 October 2026. This topic has not been addressed in Romanian-language media, while at the international level only related issues have been discussed, mainly through reports on events and various brief analyses published after the early elections in RS.

Through this article, based on scientific research and focusing in particular on Milorad Dodik's political actions over the past year, and by employing a logical deduction approach, we aim to identify an answer to the aforementioned research question. By providing such an answer, the article contributes to the development of knowledge in the field by constructing the political portrait of the RS leader and anticipating potential changes that may emerge on the Bosnian political scene following the general elections in the autumn of this year.

The paper is useful for scholars and practitioners in academia, as well as for those interested in geopolitics and geostrategy, as it helps complete the regional security “puzzle” of the Western Balkans by advancing new perspectives on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

For the drafting of this article, we exclusively employed qualitative research methods in order to identify arguments on the basis of which to construct an answer to the research question: “Will Milorad Dodik leave the political scene in Republika Srpska after the elections of October 2026?”. As a research instrument, we used process



tracing (Wiesner, 2014) in order to identify the causes that led to the removal of the SNSD leader from the presidency of Republika Srpska. The article examines Milorad Dodik's political actions over the course of the past year, as well as the decisions taken by the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina that contributed to the removal of the RS president and the organisation of early elections. To this end, we analysed articles published by both pro-Western and anti-Western media outlets in Republika Srpska, observing differences in perception and in the portrayal of Milorad Dodik – on the one hand as a “hero” of the Serbs, and on the other hand as a “threat” to the other two constituent peoples of the Bosnian state. We constructed a case study centred on the personality of Milorad Dodik, after which, through logical deduction, we sought to identify arguments on which to base our answer to the stated research question, using as evidence the causes that led to the current situation of the Serbian leader.

By tracking the political events in which Milorad Dodik was involved and his reactions to them (including the monitoring the judicial proceedings), it was possible to establish cause-and-effect relationships and uncover causal mechanisms, thereby contributing to the clarification of how the final result – namely, the answer to the research question – would be obtained. A causal mechanism is understood as a link or connection within a causal process. In the relationship between a given independent variable (in this case, the Bosnian judiciary, represented by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and a given dependent variable (the political leader Milorad Dodik), a causal mechanism implies the presence of additional variables (such as the positioning of foreign actors, other political leaders, and the reaction patterns of Bosnian law enforcement institutions). These variables provide insights into how the independent variable effectively produces the outcome, including the sequence through which this outcome materialises (Wiesner, 2014).

The research also faces a number of limitations resulting from the fact that the study relies exclusively on open-source materials in English and Serbian. For a more comprehensive approach and a more accurate assessment of the political leader of Republika Srpska, it would have been necessary to include open-source materials in Russian as well,

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which could have illustrated how the Serbian leader is perceived in the Russian Federation – an external state actor with divergent interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, only qualitative methods were employed due to financial, time, and space constraints, as a public opinion survey regarding the political standing of the SNSD leader, Milorad Dodik, would normally have complemented this type of research.

THE POLITICAL RISE OF SNSD PRESIDENT MILORAD DODIK

SNSD President Milorad Dodik was born in Banja Luka in 1959. He attended Laktaši Primary School (1966-1974), the Agricultural High School in Banja Luka (1974-1977) and graduated from the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade (1983). He is married to Snježana, with whom he has a son, Igor, and a daughter, Gorica. In 1996, Milorad Dodik founded the Party of Independent Social Democrats, which later changed its name to the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). He has led this political party since 2002. Milorad Dodik began his political career in 1986 as Chairman of the Executive Council of Laktaši Municipality (a town near Banja Luka, where he still resides today). Before Bosnia and Herzegovina's first multi-party elections in 1990, he became a member of Ante Marković's Alliance of Reform Forces. Between 1991 and 2000, he was a member of the NARS (National Assembly of Republika Srpska), and between 1998 and 2001 he served as Prime Minister of Republika Srpska (RS), as SNSD candidate. He was again a member of NARS (2002-2006), Prime Minister of RS (2006-2010), President of RS for two terms (2010-2018) and Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2018-2022) (CIN, 2025). Between 2022 and 2025, Milorad Dodik served as President of RS until the Central Electoral Commission annulled his mandate (6 August 2025). He was found guilty and sentenced to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban on holding the office of President of RS for failing to comply with decisions issued by the High Representative of the International Community (OHR) (Central Election Commission Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2025).



In the research process, SNSD President Milorad Dodik constitutes an additional variable because his actions are a function of the independent variable represented by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, it was observed that after each decision of the Constitutional Court, Milorad Dodik reacted either through secessionist statements or through concrete actions, such as proposing laws aimed at the independence of the judiciary in RS and limiting the activities of state law enforcement institutions on the territory of RS.

Next, through the analysis of the open sources that appeared in the international press, we present the main events that led to Milorad Dodik's removal from the leadership of the entity. Particular attention has been paid to both articles (especially those published in the Serbian language-media of RS) that portray him favourably and to articles that present him as a negative figure on the Bosnian political scene.

SNSD PRESIDENT MILORAD DODIK: A HERO FOR THE ETHNIC SERB POPULATION

By following the trial, this chapter highlights the causal mechanism between the Bosnian justice system (the independent variable) and Milorad Dodik (the additional variable) by identifying the cause-effect relationships that led to the perception of Milorad Dodik as a hero among the ethnic Serb population. We presented the causal relationship between the Bosnian judiciary, Milorad Dodik and international actors, such as Serbia and the Russian Federation on the one hand, and the United Kingdom and the United States on the other, identified as dependent variables within the research methodology.

Milorad Dodik moved away from liberal Western values and gradually became a supporter of the Russian Federation, using the positions he held to increase his influence and political control in RS. By promoting secessionist ideas, denying the Srebrenica genocide and attacking Bosnian politicians in the media, Milorad Dodik shaped a political portrait of a "hero" of the B-Serb population. At the same time, he became the target of sanctions by the United Kingdom and the United States (additional variables).

As the leader of the largest Bosnian Serb nationalist political party, Milorad Dodik won (2010) the presidency of the RS with the support

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of Serbian politicians (additional variable). During the election campaign, he attracted voters by promoting the slogan “RS first, Bosnia only as long as it must exist”, emphasising the existing fears and interethnic tensions at that time. By denying the Srebrenica genocide, he strengthened his cultural and religious ties with Serbia, and presented himself as a politician and protector of the Bosnian Serb population who puts “Srpska first”. Thus, he managed to secure the electorate and remain in leading positions within Republika Srpska for more than 25 years (he first served as Prime Minister of RS between 1998 and 2001) (Mack, 2021). Therefore, Milorad Dodik’s actions (additional variable) contributed to consolidating support among the B-Serb electorate and maintaining his influence over the Bosnian political decision-making process for a long time.

In all the leadership positions, he held in RS or within the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Milorad Dodik promoted Serbian nationalism and transformed it into a source of political power. He permanently portrayed himself as a victim, claiming to be the target of an anti-Serb conspiracy. In all corruption cases in which criminal proceedings were initiated against him, Milorad Dodik rejected the legitimacy of investigations and trials conducted by Bosnian institutions, arguing that these institutions could not act objectively and that their actions were, in fact, directed against the B-Serb people. In his political speech, Milorad Dodik pleaded for the independence of RS and took secessionist actions to separate state-level institutions from those of RS (Ibid.). Milorad Dodik’s lawyers (additional variable) also used arguments related to his ethnic identity in legal disputes involving the Bosnian judiciary system (independent variable). In the period between 2018 and 2022, while serving as the Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he refused to participate in official activities held at the Presidency headquarters whenever the flag of RS was not displayed alongside the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a position strongly contested by the other two members of the Tripartite Presidency (additional variables) (Kovacevic, 2018).

As President of RS, the SNSD leader established an auxiliary police structure exclusively for RS and used it to suppress the “Justice



for David” protest movement in 2018 claiming that the demonstrations were politically motivated. In his efforts to consolidate political power, on the Russian model, allegations also emerged linking his political environment to acts of intimidation and violence. In this context, Slaviša Krunić, a prominent businessman and critic of the political regime led by Milorad Dodik, was assassinated (22 April 2019) in Banja Luka, without those responsible even being conclusively identified (Niksic, 2019).

So, Milorad Dodik used his Serbian identity and fuelled interethnic tensions in his region to gain more and more political power. The Bosnian state, with less and less oversight and low involvement from the international community, seemed to be increasingly divided. Against the background of these developments, RS gained increased independence, and Milorad Dodik positioned himself as the leading political figure in RS and as a defender of the rights, interests and freedoms of B-Serbs (Mack, Ibid.). Serbian nationalism has been further supported by SNSD President Milorad Dodik through his participating in major events in Serbia, together with President Aleksandar Vučić. In this regard, in the last two years, the close ties between Milorad Dodik, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Russian President Vladimir Putin have become increasingly evident, contributing to the emergence of a Banja Luka-Belgrade-Budapest axis that promotes Pan-Slavic ideas in Europe with political support from Moscow (additional variables). Milorad Dodik has increasingly expressed his desire to separate the institutions of RS from those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and has continued to act as a disruptive factor within the Bosnian state. During 2024, ties among Serb representatives across the Western Balkans region were strengthened through the organisation of the All-Serb Assembly at the Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade. In this context, with the involvement of leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a declaration was adopted by presenting the Serbian nation as a cross-border community with protected rights. The declaration states that RS should retain full autonomy within Bosnia and Herzegovina and that, as an autonomous entity, could cooperate with Serbia in a number of policy areas, including security and information sharing. Even though the declaration had only symbolic

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significance and did not encourage actions beyond the limits set by the Dayton Peace Agreement, it paved the way for the narratives of more radical groups. The document promoted the agenda of a nation treated unfairly and in need of a reassessment of its status and values within the Western Balkans (Nyemann, 2025).

In the context of the tense political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and following his first-instance conviction (26 February 2025), Milorad Dodik made several visits to Moscow, where he met with Russian officials, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The most relevant meeting between the SNSD leader and Sergey Lavrov took place behind closed doors (09 September 2025) during a session of the United Nations Security Council in New York, following which the Russian Foreign Ministry condemned what it described as the *“neo-colonial interference of the West in the internal affairs of the Republika Srpska”* and strongly condemned the dishonest attempts to remove the legitimately elected President of RS (Mišeljić, 2025).

Therefore, in the context of these developments, the secessionist tendencies of RS reached their highest level in the last year, while Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced its most severe political crisis in the last thirty years. Milorad Dodik emphasised his rhetoric about RS autonomy, while promoting the ideas of the entity’s independence. In his speeches, he appealed to Serbian identity and collective memory, increasing his electoral popularity and his influence over the media.

SNSD PRESIDENT MILORAD DODIK: A “DANGER” TO OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

This chapter presents the cause-effect relationships from a Western perspective in which the Bosnian justice system (the independent variable) is a trigger for the additional variables represented, on the one hand, by Milorad Dodik and, on the other hand, by international actors such as the United States, the United Kingdom and the law enforcement institutions of the Bosnian state.

Milorad Dodik’s behaviour and the secessionist actions undertaken by him and members of his political entourage have long attracted the attention of the international community. Thus, the UK became



the first state to impose (2022) sanctions on Milorad Dodik (the Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency at the time) and Željka Cvijanović (the President of RS at the time) on the grounds that the two Bosnian Serb leaders were destabilising the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have been banned from travelling to the United Kingdom and have had all their financial assets frozen because, in coordination with the Kremlin authorities, they promote secessionist ideas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and destabilise the Bosnian state (GOV UK, 2022). In the process presented above, the cause-effect relationship between the additional variables is highlighted (Milorad Dodik and Great Britain).

During 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced its most acute political crisis since the creation of the Bosnian state, generated by the secessionist actions of SNSD President Milorad Dodik and the long-term blocking of the functioning of central state institutions. The political scene was dominated by developments in Milorad Dodik's trial. His case began in 2023, when he was prosecuted for failing to comply with decisions of the High Representative of the International Community (HRIC) and for obstructing the implementation of decisions of the Constitutional Court (CC) of Bosnia and Herzegovina in RS by adopting laws rejecting such a procedure in RS. Thus, Milorad Dodik refused to recognise the authority of the HRIC and the CC on the territory of the RS (Brezar, 2025). The independent variable thus generated a series of "domino" effects within RS with Milorad Dodik (the additional variable) as the main pawn.

The political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has become additionally tense following Dodik's first-instance conviction (26 February 2025) to one year of imprisonment and banned from holding public office for six years. Immediately, after the verdict was announced, the SNSD leader organised a peaceful protest in Banja Luka. In his speech, he mentioned the support he enjoyed from the Kremlin leader, Vladimir Putin, but also from Budapest, referring to the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In the same context, he continued to promote messages of Serbian unity, reinforcing his image as a political protector of the Serbian people (Delauney, 2025). Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić insisted that Serbia

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did not recognise the verdict, while calling for a *“peaceful, rational and non-escalatory response”*. Predictably, Budapest and Moscow (additional variables) quickly aligned themselves with Belgrade’s position. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán denounced the decision as a *“dictate from Brussels”*, praising Dodik for opposing the *“globalist agenda of EU-appointed supervisors”*. Moscow has called the verdict against Milorad Dodik an *“illegal criminal prosecution”*, warning that the ruling endangers the unity of the Bosnian state. The reflexive solidarity between Belgrade, Budapest and Moscow illustrates how illiberal actors are instrumentalise the rhetoric of sovereignty in order to weaken Brussels’ normative influence, transforming Bosnia and Herzegovina into a proxy battleground in a wider struggle over Europe’s future political order (Ermina Muzaferija, 2025).

Against the background of these developments, Milorad Dodik (additional variable) submitted to parliamentary procedure a series of laws annulling the authority of state courts and law enforcement agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the territory of RS. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into these actions, considering them an attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina’s constitutional order and summoned Milorad Dodik for questioning together with NARS President Nenad Stevandić and RS Prime Minister Radovan Višković. A *“stress test”* for the entire state apparatus ensued when all three accused politicians rejected the CC’s subpoena and surrounded themselves with armed police officers and bodyguards, openly challenging the CC (independent variable) and the State Information and Protection Agency (SIPA) to arrest them (the additional variable). Moreover, they issued an ultimatum to Serbs employed by the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina and SIPA, urging them to transfer to the courts and police structures of RS (additional variables). Milorad Dodik threatened to remove those who refused, but never took concrete measures in this regard. He launched an international media campaign seeking support from the new US administration, which never received him, and later travelled to Israel (26-27 March 2025), where he was asked to leave a conference he was attending. On the other hand, his visit to Hungary (05 August 2025)



and Russia (31 March 2025) where marked by a warm reception and expressions of political support (Huskić-2). This process illustrates the positioning of additional variables (the United States, Israel, law enforcement institutions) in relation to the independent variable (the Bosnian justice represented by the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Milorad Dodik appeared (on 04 July 2025) before the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, after which the arrest warrant issued against him was cancelled, subject to the obligation to report to the local police station every 15 days. The same arrangement was later extended to the other two “fugitives”. Their decision to cease challenging the authority of the state court was likely due to the lack of international support for their actions. Milorad Dodik received harsh warnings from European capitals, and in the absence of support in the European Council due to the Hungarian veto, some states imposed bilateral sanctions against Milorad Dodik, notably Germany and Austria (Ibid.). Dodik’s team of lawyers succeeding in converting his one-year prison sentence (12 August 2025) into a fine of 18,660 EUR, while the six-year ban on holding public office was maintained. At that time, the Central Election Commission (CEC) annulled his mandate as President of the RS. He dismissed the decision as “another nonsense from Sarajevo” and declared that “surrender is not an option”. Despite this decision, he continued to pursue his secessionist agenda by obstructing the functioning of state-level institutions (Melez, 2025). These developments illustrate the cause-and-effect relationships shaping the Bosnian political landscape.

Against this background, Milorad Dodik was preparing his son, Igor Dodik, to assume a leadership role within the party, while also considering Željka Cvijanović, the current Bosnian Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a potential successor. Ironically, Milorad Dodik announced that he would continue the “legal battle” by appealing to the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the European Court of Human Rights. Remaining consistent with his destructive nature, he also proposed organising a referendum to seek public support in RS and hinted at the possibility of future referendum on the independence of RS (effects of the independent variable, generated by the decision to condemn the Serbian leader).

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The United States Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) lifted (29 September 2025) sanctions imposed on former RS President, Milorad Dodik and 47 individuals and companies associated with him. Sanctions were also lifted for Zeljka Cvijanović, the Serbian member of the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, NARS President Nenad Stevandić, Dodik's children Igor and Gorica and several companies owned by them.

Previously (2024), Milorad Dodik had promoted amendments to the RS Referendum Law, making any referendum valid, regardless of voter turnout. In its initial form, this law stipulated that at least 50% of registered voters had to participate for a referendum to be considered valid (Huskić-2). Therefore, NARS voted (23 August 2025) in favour of organising a referendum in support of Milorad Dodik. Citizens were expected to answer the following questions: *“Do you accept the decisions of the unelected foreigner Christian Schmidt and the unconstitutional decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the decision of the Central Election Commission to strip RS President Milorad Dodik of his mandate?”*. The referendum was initially scheduled (25 August 2025) a few days before the early presidential elections, but it was ultimately cancelled (Kurtic-1, 2025).

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Next, the early presidential elections in RS demonstrated (23.11.2025) a narrow and contested victory for Milorad Dodik's political party. Although he ultimately complied with the CC's decision, the Bosnian Serb leader clearly stated his continued influence by declaring: *“I remain the most important man and I will be the president of all presidents of Republika Srpska. Is that enough?”*. With a low

voter turnout of approximately 35%, SNSD candidate Siniša Karan, close associate to Milorad Dodik, won slightly more than 50% of the vote (50.39%), while the main opposition candidate, Branko Blanuša (Serbian Democratic Party, SDS), trailed by only a few thousand votes (approximately 8,000 – 48.22%). In political terms, the election result can be interpreted more as a wake-up call rather than as a triumph for the ruling party. For a political leader who has long relied on administrative control, institutional pressure, and the mobilisation of the party apparatus, such a narrow victory is considered politically costly. It signals a decrease in political support for SNSD ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for autumn 2026. The elections were not just a regular competition between the government and the opposition, but were part of a struggle over the rule of law, the authority of state judicial institutions and the willingness of political elites in RS to comply with court decisions. The elections have once again highlighted the structural weaknesses of electoral integrity in RS, with a very low voter turnout, raising questions about political disengagement, disillusionment with the options available, and the credibility of the process itself. The extreme results at certain polling stations, especially in Doboј and Zvornik, where Siniša Karan allegedly received up to 98% of the vote in some locations, suggest organised manipulation rather than normal electoral variation. In addition, the transportation of voters from Serbia by bus also appears to have played a decisive tool. This practice is not new and has functioned as a two-way instrument of political support, with RS structures mobilising voters for Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia, while Serbian electorate assisted Milorad Dodik during RS elections. Such cross-border electoral mobilisation may have helped SNSD secure a narrow victory, but at the cost of further undermining trust in democratic procedures and damaging its political credibility. At the same time, Dodik's party shows signs of clear weakness and can no longer mobilise voters as effectively as it did in previous years. Based on complaints submitted by opposition parties, the CEC decided to repeat (08 February 2026) the elections in 136 polling stations across 17 municipalities (N1, 2025). However, given that the repeated vote concerns only selected polling stations, any reversal of the overall result would almost certainly be rejected by the leadership of the ruling party.



The organisation of early presidential elections in Republika Srpska is an effect of the decisions of the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina (independent variable) seen in relation to the actions of SNSD leader Milorad Dodik, the positions adopted by foreign actors and the responses of Bosnian law enforcement institutions (additional variables).

CONCLUSIONS

The presentation of the events on the Bosnian political scene over the past year has made it possible to identify cause-and-effect relationships between the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina, identified as an independent variable, and Bosnian political leaders, foreign actors and Bosnian law enforcement institutions, identified as additional variables. The discovery of the causal mechanisms linking the independent variable to these additional variables has enabled the construction of Milorad Dodik's political profile, as perceived both by Western states and by countries such as the Russian Federation and Serbia. The effects of these causal relationships provide the basis for answering the research question established at the onset of this scientific research.

The president of the SNSD party, Milorad Dodik, has been and remains, for the time being, an emblematic figure of RS. He has dominated the political scene in RS for the past 25 years and remains the most influential politician in the entity. Through his actions, he has developed a political profile perceived by the ethnic Serb population as that of a protector of their interests, rights and freedoms, while, at the same time, being viewed by much of the ethnic Bosnian population as a danger to the Bosnian state, acting exclusively in the interest of the Serb community rather than those of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. Milorad Dodik has always been oriented towards consolidating Serbian political power and reducing the authority of state institutions based in Sarajevo. He constantly maintains that central institutions should exercise fewer powers and has maintained close ties with the Russian Federation, amplifying messages about autonomy and sovereignty among his RS electorate. Thus, he has become the principle political vehicle (proxy) through which secessionist ideas have been

The organisation of early presidential elections in Republika Srpska is an effect of the decisions of the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina (independent variable) seen in relation to the actions of SNSD leader Milorad Dodik, the positions adopted by foreign actors and the responses of Bosnian law enforcement institutions (additional variables).



promoted, reaching the gradual implementation of such policies over the past year. However, the approach was stopped for the moment, when the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina ruled that his actions violated the constitutional order of the Bosnian state.

The first-instance conviction of Milorad Dodik on 26 February 2025 to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban from holding public office led to political and security tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that time, Milorad Dodik adopted increased security measures and sometimes travelled by helicopter in order to reduce the risk of arrest by SIPA representatives (Serbian Times, 2025). Finally, his removal from office revealed the capacity of the Bosnian state's institutional framework, in which the JRIC, the judiciary and the CEC acted together overcome obstruction at the entity level and enforce compliance with the Dayton constitutional order (Ermina Muzaferija, Ibid.). However, Dodik's removal from the presidency of the RS has not brought the political crisis to an end, rather it has prolonged it, especially if opposition parties were to prevail following the repeated elections in the 17 municipalities. Although unlikely, such an outcome would certainly be contested by SNSD representatives.

Recent political events, such as the celebration (09 January 2026) of the National Day of RS, featured Milorad Dodik alongside leading Serbian political figures in Banja Luka (TV, 2026). This suggests that, although no longer serving as President of RS, he remains one of the influential leaders within the SNSD. Considering his political actions and especially the fact that he relinquished the presidency under both domestic and international pressure, while the NARS repealed the controversial laws that had expanded RS powers and limited state oversight, it can reasonably be inferred that Dodik has merely “stepped back” and continues to exert influence “from behind the scenes”. He secured his party's stay in power by promoting S. Karan, a close friend of his, to the leadership of RS. Under these conditions, at least until the general elections scheduled for October this year, Milorad Dodik is likely to remain actively involved in the electoral campaign as SNSD president, but will not appear in the forefront of Bosnian politics. However, the lifting of US sanctions on Dodik and his close associates will allow them to rebuild the financial resources necessary for future

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elections. Currently, the SNSD seems to be a party in need of internal renewal and the development of a new generation of candidates capable of competing in the upcoming elections. The relatively short time until the October elections, combined with continuing controversies with opposition political parties, leaves little time for the emergence of entirely new political figures capable of securing a decisive electoral victory. Therefore, it is unlikely that Milorad Dodik himself will seek a return as a candidate, as such a move would directly contradict the judicial ruling against him and could trigger further legal proceedings. Moreover, the low voter turnout in the recent early elections (35% of the electorate) and the narrow margin separating the SNSD candidate from the SDS candidate (the main opposition party) demonstrate the apathy of the Serbian electorate that seems to be “*fed up*” with the SNSD governance and wants a change in RS. At the same time, Milorad Dodik’s age (67 years old) and reported health problems, exacerbated by the pressures experienced over the past year, reduce the likelihood of his return to frontline politics (SRNA, 2024). Considering all the arguments presented above, we can appreciate that there are low chances that Milorad Dodik will reappear as a candidate for public office in the general elections of RS is relatively low.

In this scenario, Milorad Dodik will most likely not reappear on the RS political scene, but will seek to identify political candidates capable of winning future elections. Željka Cvijanović, the current Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, could emerge as a strong candidate for the RS Presidency. If Željka Cvijanović decides to run for the RS Presidency, Milorad Dodik will likely support a lower-profile SNSD candidate for the position of Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency. The SNSD’s strategic priority will be maximise electoral support within RS and secure key positions within the entity, rather than necessarily winning the position of Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In conclusion, regardless of the specific electoral scenario, Milorad Dodik is likely to remain an influential political figure in the Republika Srpska, even if he is compelled to comply with the Constitutional Court’s decision prohibiting him from holding public office in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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