

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a population of 3.2 million, became independent from the former Yugoslavia on 3 March 1992, following a referendum that was boycotted by ethnic Serbs. Bosnia and Herzegovina was offered a European Union membership perspective at the EU-Western Balkans summit in Thessaloniki in 2003. Building on the European Commission's recommendation of 12 March 2024, the European Council decided on 21 March to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Background

Bosnia and Herzegovina is implementing the [EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilisation and Association Agreement](#), which entered into force in June 2015, but the country's path to European integration has been rather slow, due to internal political instability and a lack of progress on [electoral and constitutional reforms](#). The EU and international community have been active in promoting stability through the [EUFOR Althea military operation](#) and the [Office of the High Representative](#). The EU has also [contributed](#) to military and medical capabilities, financed through the [European Peace Facility](#).

Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for EU membership in 2016. In its 2019 [opinion](#), the European Commission identified 14 key priority actions for the country before the EU could open accession negotiations, including deep reform of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. Following its [2023 annual report](#), the Commission [proposed](#) to open accession negotiations; this proposal was [followed](#) by the European Council on 21 March 2024, when EU leaders decided to open accession negotiations. The Commission will now prepare the negotiating framework, to be adopted by the Council. Internal [electoral and constitutional reforms](#) will be an important part of the accession process.

Among the most delicate issues are relations between different levels of government and in particular with Republika Srpska, one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's two entities, the other being the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In October 2021, Milorad Dodik, the Serbian member of Bosnia's tripartite presidency, and leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) party, [threatened](#) to withdraw Bosnian Serbs from key institutions. The Parliament of Republika Srpska [took](#) legislative steps to initiate this withdrawal through a 49-3 vote, including a declaration that called for a new constitution for the entity. In 2024, Dodik [stated](#) that he would set up his own 'Republic Election Commission' in Republika Srpska, in a direct challenge to the authority of the state-level Central Election Commission, ahead of local elections due in October 2024. Internal challenges are compounded by external interference, mainly from [Russia](#), as Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of three countries in the region that have not yet joined NATO.

### European Parliament position

Parliament adopted its [resolution](#) on the 2022 Commission report on 12 July 2023. It reiterated clear support for democratic transformation through European integration. The report also calls on all actors to ensure that elections go ahead in October 2024 as planned. Welcoming the recent reinforcement of EUFOR Althea and the support provided under the European Peace Facility, the Parliament called for the EU to take practical steps to incorporate the Western Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina within a broader strategic and security context, not least in view of Russia's war on Ukraine and malign interference destabilising the country and region. Parliament also denounced in the strongest terms the Republika Srpska leadership's recurrent inflammatory rhetoric and secessionist laws and policies.

*This 'At a glance' note has been produced at the request of a member of the European Committee of the Regions, in the framework of the cooperation agreement between the Parliament and the Committee.*

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Author: Branislav Stanicek, Members' Research Service  
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[epres@ep.europa.eu](mailto:epres@ep.europa.eu) (contact) <http://www.epres.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)