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# Bosnian unrest: a united economic uprising



Bosnians unite as warfare is no longer divided along ethnic lines, but economic ones

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UNREST has returned to Bosnia as the country experiences the largest social and political protests since the 1992-95 war.

Demonstrations began over a week ago and have spread across every republic of the former Yugoslavia, with protesters demanding the dismantlement of the government.

We examine the origins of what is now being called the 'Bosnian Spring' and where it is likely to lead.

**Background to the protests:**

The latest protests were born out of decades of dictatorial rule, a ruling elite and a desperate economic situation, recent commentators claim.

"For years, fear of a return to conflict has kept a large part of the population discontent," Reuters says, but Bosnians' patience is running out.

"The people have finally had enough of the nepotism, the corruption and the unprofessional government", Damir Arsenijevic, a professor at Tuzla University, told Euronews.

The anger is rooted in economic frustration. The official unemployment rate sits at roughly 40 per cent, almost four times higher than the EU average. Corrupt privatisation processes after the war almost destroyed the middle class and plunged the working class into poverty.

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### Who is protesting and why?

The original protests began in the previously thriving industrial city of Tuzla. Factory workers united to demand unpaid salaries and pensions after factories went bankrupt.

The workers were later joined by students, political activists and war veterans who began a larger protest movement over government corruption and the state of the economy.

The protests soon spread to other cities including Sarajevo, Zenica and Mostar.

Their demands include government resignations, a reduction in government salaries, a budget revision, and early elections.

Protesters see no other option than to take to the streets. "This is the only language our politicians understand", one activist told [Reuters](#).

Although Bosniaks have made up the majority of protesters, Serbs and Croats have also begun to take part in the movement.

"The people of Bosnia have finally understood who their true enemy is: not other ethnic groups, but their own leaders who pretend to protect them," Slavoj Žižek writes in [The Guardian](#).

Instead of fighting over national identity and religion, "people are now asking the real question: where is our money," writes Bosnian columnist [Andrej Nikolaidis](#).

### What has the response been?

The immediate response included calling in the Special Forces to deal with protesters as well as increasing police presence across many major cities.

Governments in several of the Muslim-Croat cantons have resigned, but protesters are still demanding the resignation of state-level government officials.

The High Representative, Valentin Inzko, caused outrage when he suggested military intervention by the EU.

[William Hague](#) called the protests 'a wake-up call' and encouraged Bosnian leaders to listen to the legitimate concerns of the public and engage in 'constructive dialogue'. He also said the UK remained a firm ally of Bosnia.

Milorad Dodik, leader of the Bosnian Serbs, has blamed the international community for the protests, saying that they were attempting to "create instability which would justify increased involvement in the country's internal affairs", the [IWPR](#) reports.

### Should the international community intervene?

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton is rumoured to be planning a visit to Sarajevo next week in response to calls from some within the union, [Reuters](#) reports.

Paddy Ashdown, former High Representative and Europe's Special Envoy to Bosnia has also urged immediate action. "If they don't act now, I greatly fear that a situation where secessionism will take hold could easily become unstoppable", he told [CNN's](#) Christiane Amanpour.

However, other commentators argue that foreign intervention should be avoided and a Bosnian solution to Bosnia's problems must be found.

"Ashdown-style international activism is the problem in Bosnia," Alida Vracic, leader of the Sarajevo think tank Populari, argues. She believes the presence of international mediators will allow local politicians to avoid accountability.



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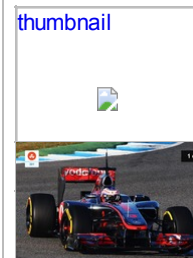
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### What next?

"If we need to have [another] war, so be it," said Fehim Lovic, 58, a disabled war veteran who supports three children on a monthly welfare payment of 50 Bosnian marka (£20)."

For now, “demonstrators are waving three flags side by side: Bosnian, Serb, Croat,” and for the first time in history, protests are based purely on economic discontent, rather than ethnic rivalry.

However, there are fears that “further unrest may take on an ethnic dimension, as each community seeks to protect itself from, or exploit, the turmoil”, Daria Sito-Sucic and Matt Robinson report for Reuters.

There are also concerns that protests could not only intensify across the Bosnian republics, but also spread across the Balkans.

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