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Russia Returns Gifted Orthodox Icon to Bosnia After East Ukraine Controversy

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Sergei Lavrov and Milorad Dodik **Russian Foreign Ministry**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has returned an 18th-century Orthodox Christian icon to Bosnia and Herzegovina embassy after reports said the religious artifact originated from rebel-held eastern Ukraine.

Lavrov received the 300-year-old icon as a gift from Milorad Dodik, the Serb chair of Bosnia's three-man presidency, during his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina on Dec. 14. Shortly after, Bosnian Serb media reported that the icon was taken from the Luhansk region of eastern Ukraine which has been controlled by pro-Russian rebels since 2014.

Lavrov has returned the icon to the Bosnian Embassy in Moscow, the state-run TASS news agency reported Wednesday.

"On Dec. 23, in agreement with the donor, the icon was transferred to the Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Moscow. At the same time, the partners were recommended to use available legal mechanisms to clarify all the circumstances of this case, including the origin of

the said artifact," TASS quoted the Russian Foreign Ministry as saying.

Following Lavrov's visit to Bosnia, the Ukrainian Embassy in Sarajevo had sent a note to Bosnia's foreign ministry demanding an urgent explanation into the icon's origins.

Dodik's office denied the reports of it being from eastern Ukraine.

A number of Bosnian Serbs have fought alongside pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukraine conflict.

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