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HUMAN  
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Ms. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović  
President  
Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia  
Pantovčak 241  
10000 Zagreb  
Croatia

*Re: Unlawful Pushbacks at Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina Border*

Dear President Grabar-Kitarović,

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch to ask you to order both an investigation into unlawful pushbacks of migrants by Croatian border officials and a halt to such actions.

In an interview with Swiss television SRF on July 9, you acknowledged unlawful pushbacks of migrants by Croatian border officials to Bosnia Herzegovina and admitted that in some instances force is used. This contradicts previous denials by Croatian officials, but is consistent with the [findings of Human Rights Watch](#), the UN Refugee Agency, and other organizations.

The summary return of migrants by an EU member state to a non-EU member state without first considering protection needs and with the use of force violates multiple EU laws and the UN Refugee Convention. The acknowledgement that Croatian officials are engaged in such actions creates a duty to carry out an investigation, to ensure that those responsible are held to account, and to ensure that no similar actions take place.

During a research mission to Bosnia Herzegovina in November 2018, Human Rights Watch documented serious issues of concern relating to how Croatian border officials push back asylum seekers and other migrants at the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In many cases such pushbacks were accompanied by violence.

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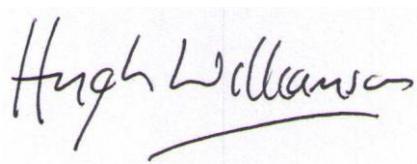
We communicated our findings to the Croatian Ministry of Interior in December and in its December 4 response, the Minister of Interior denied all allegations of pushbacks and violence. In a May 20 meeting with Ms. Terezija Gras, State Secretary at the Ministry of Interior, Human Rights Watch was told that no pushbacks are taking place, that all returns to Bosnia Herzegovina are conducted in accordance with Croatian and EU law, and that our evidence was based on fabricated stories. Ms. Gras also accused activists of impersonating Croatian police officers, and subjecting migrants to injuries to make the Croatian police look bad.

HRW's findings add to existing reporting of such abuses. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported in August 2018 allegations of summary returns by Croatian police as well as hundreds of allegations of violence and theft. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called on your government to investigate all allegations of summary returns and violence. Similarly, Amnesty International published a report in March echoing similar concerns.

Human Rights Watch has previously communicated similar concerns regarding violent pushbacks of asylum seekers and other migrants at the Croatian-Serbian border in November 2016, where the Ministry of Interior in its response to us also denied all allegations.

We call on you to ensure that responsible Croatian authorities take immediate steps to put an end to unlawful and violent pushbacks and bring laws and practices in line with international refugee law and EU law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hugh Williamson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Hugh Williamson  
Director, Europe and Central Asia Division  
Human Rights Watch