

# **BALKANS: BOMB BLAST IN KOSOVAN CAPITAL**

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PRISTINA/BELGRADE, 9 Nov. (AKI) -- An explosion shook the capital of Muslim-majority Kosovo, Pristina early on Wednesday, destroying a car parked near the offices of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The blast took place as the press in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, reported that Russia has 'betrayed' Serbia and it not prepared to use its veto in the UN Security Council to prevent Kosovo from gaining independence. OSCE's mission in Kosovo is mandated with institution- and democracy-building, promoting human rights and the rule of law, and is part of the UN interim administration that has controlled Kosovo since 1999.

According to agency reports, an Audi 44 exploded in the center of Pristina, apparently without anyone being injured. It was the third bomb to be detonated near the OSCE offices this year. Meanwhile, armed gangs were spotted again in southwestern Kosovo, checking cars and their passengers near the town of Kacanik.

The incidents took place only a day after United States undersecretary of state Nicholas Burns warned that the international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (Kfor) would use force to prevent the use of violence as means of pressure during the talks on the final status of the province

Meanwhile in Belgrade, daily Kurir revealed on Wednesday that Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov told Serbian leaders during a visit on Monday not to count on Russia's veto in the Security Council to block Kosovo's bid for independence. In a front page story, headlined "The Russians betrayed us," the paper said Lavrov had made it clear to Serbia's president Boris Tadic and prime minister Vojislav Kostunica, that Moscow was not willing to challenge the Western powers over Kosovo. There is a prevailing belief, based on hints from Washington and the European capitals, that the West is moving towards granting Kosovo independence, to appease the majority ethnic Albanians in the province.

But government spokesman Srdjan Djuric wasted no time in denying the Kurir story, saying it represented a "gross deception of the public". The truth about Lavrov's talks in Belgrade "is quite the opposite from everything that has been said in the paper", Djuric told the national news agency Tanjug.

"As was pointed out in the statement following the talks between Lavrov and Kostunica, Serbia's prime minister is exceptionally satisfied

with the principled support of the Russian Federation to our country and to key principles of the government of Serbia with regard to solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija," said Djuric. He criticised the paper for using "unacceptable language" in describing the talks, and said that "the Russian federation and Sergei Lavrov are convinced of the respect and goodwill which Belgrade and Serbia nurture towards the Russian federation."

Belgrade opposes the majority ethnic Albanians' demands, offering them "more than autonomy, but less than independence." But according to Kurir, Lavrov told Belgrade leaders to better prepare their position before meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin later this month in Moscow.

Political analyst Bratislav Grubacic told Kurir that the hope of a Russian veto was "just an illusion," adding that Moscow had too many problems of its own. Equally, said Grubacic, China had no particular interests in the Balkans, and would not jeopardise its relations with the West over Kosovo.

Ultimately, Grubacic concluded, "the international community will come up with a solution for Kosovo which would be acceptable to all, and that means it won't be acceptable for us." Since the positions of Belgrade and Pristina are irreconcilable over the independence issue, other political analysts agreed that the special UN envoy to the status talks, former president of Finland Martti Ahtisaari, would have to formulate a solution that would be adopted by the Security Council, with Russian and Chinese abstention in a best-case scenario.

Former US secretary of state, Richard Holbrooke, an expert on Balkan affairs, who advocates Kosovo's independence, supported this thesis in testimony to the Senate foreign relations committee on Tuesday. "China has no real stake in this issue," he said. Among other four members of the Security Council with the power of veto, "only Russia could have a problem with this, because of traditional ties with Serbia, and because of the precedent which could relate to some other issues, like Chechnya," Holbrooke concluded.

Belgrade claims that granting Kosovo independence would have a domino effect in all Balkan countries with sizable ethnic Albanian minority, such as Macedonia, northern Greece and Montenegro, and could destabilise the entire region. Ethnic Albanian leaders in Pristina claim precisely the opposite, and their message seems to have found more receptive ears in the West.

News from RTV B92 for Nov 8, 2005

Russia insists on Belgrade involvement in Kosovo solution | 11:06 November 08 | B92

BELGRADE, PRISTINA, BRUSSELS -- Tuesday -- Russia has taken a firm position at the beginning of negotiations on the final status of Kosovo, insisting that the solution must be the result of an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Pristina yesterday presented his country's position on Kosovo to President Ibrahim Rugova as identical to that of the Contact Group, saying that negotiations on status must go hand-in-hand with the establishment of international standards in the province.

Rugova said after the meeting that Pristina insists on direct recognition of independence which, he says will calm the region down, and added that Kosovo is prepared to guarantee the rights of all its minority communities.

Lavrov had earlier said in Belgrade that Moscow would fight for the discussions on Kosovo's status to be held in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

In Brussels yesterday the EU appointed Austrian diplomat Stefan Lehne as its representative for the Kosovo status talks. Lehne is a close associate of EU foreign affairs boss Javier Solana, and part of his Balkans team. Lehne will act as assistant to the UN's special envoy for the talks, Finnish diplomat Maarti Ahtisaari.

Solana sees Ahtisaari and Lehne, representing the UN and the EU, as working towards a joint resolution. "These are two different appointments with a common goal, to find a formula for resolving the present situation and a definitive formula for status. The principle which we will fight for is that Kosovo, regardless of the solution, will be part of Europe and perhaps part of the EU, either independently or as part of some other state," he said.