



# KOSOVO

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### **Kosovo: The New 'Frozen Conflict'**

By Brian Whitmore, Radio Free Europe, Global Security

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/05/mil-080529-rferl01.htm>

When the European Union announced this week that it would be delaying the planned deployment of its police mission to Kosovo, it was more than your run-of-the-mill bureaucratic snafu. To the contrary, analysts say the delay is the deliberate result of a coordinated strategy by Serbia and its ally Russia to sabotage Kosovo's fledgling statehood.

When Kosovo declared independence in February, part of the plan was for the EU to take over policing duties from UNMIK, the United Nations mission whose mandate is set to expire in mid-June. The EU mission is considered key to establishing stability and security in the early phase of Kosovo's independence.

But by threatening to use its veto in the UN Security Council against authorizing the EU mission, Russia has for now effectively blocked the handover. EU officials announced on May 26 that the bloc's EULEX police mission will now not be able to deploy until September at the earliest. Analysts say this could lead to instability and provide an opportunity for continued Serbian meddling in Kosovo.

"This uncertain situation sends two bad messages," Avdulah Robaj, a Pristina-based legal analyst, tells RFE/RL's South Slavic and Albanian Languages Service. "First of all, Belgrade is still able to play a role in Kosovo. Also, Kosovar institutions are handicapped, because they cannot fulfill their functions throughout the territory of Kosovo within the given time frame."

The chaos over the UNMIK-EULEX handover comes as Belgrade is attempting to consolidate authority over northern Kosovo, an ethnic-Serbian enclave in what is otherwise an overwhelmingly ethnic-Albanian country. Kosovo authorities have virtually no authority in the north, and UNMIK has been steadily drawing down its presence there.

#### **De Facto Partition**

James Lyon, a senior Balkan adviser with the International Crisis Group, says the north has already effectively separated from Kosovo and, with the exception of NATO's KFOR peacekeepers, the international community has very little clout there.

"What has happened is indeed a de facto partition, in that the international community has -- other than the use of brute armed force via KFOR -- no influence or control over the north whatsoever," Lyon said in a recent interview with RFE/RL. "And the



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Kosovo government institutions have no influence, not even in their wildest dreams, in the north of Kosovo. And for the foreseeable future they probably won't."

According to Balkan-watchers, Serbia is seeking, with Russia's help, to turn this de facto partition of Kosovo into a de jure separation -- and is banking on the West bowing to what they see as the inevitable reality in the north. The longer EULEX deployment is delayed, the more time Kosovo Serbs and their patrons in Belgrade have to solidify their dominance in the north.

"It seems to me that both Serbia and Russia would like to see the West to come in and say, 'we're partitioning Kosovo,' as opposed to the Serbs and Russia having to say it," Lyon says. "Even though that's the outcome that Serbia and Russia think is the most logical and is the most desirable. They would rather have the West be the bad guys and the way they have played it is quite clever, in that if a partition is made it will be done because the West comes in and makes the partition official."

Some observers have speculated that a potential compromise -- one favored by Serbia -- could eventually be reached that would keep UNMIK in the north and allow the EU's EULEX mission to deploy in the south. Such a move, which UN and EU officials for now dismiss, could give further credence to the notion that Kosovo is headed for partition.

In a recent interview with RFE/RL's South Slavic and Albanian Languages Service, UNMIK head Joachim Ruecker said there can be "only one legal space in Kosovo," and categorically rejected the idea of partition.

"In my view, there should be no geographical, ethnic, or functional division of labor in the rule of law sector between different organizations, neither now nor in the future," Ruecker said.

In a May 28 interview with AP, however, Ruecker said the EU mission could come under a "UN umbrella."

### Riots

In April, tensions in northern Kosovo escalated into riots that saw one UN police officer killed and dozens injured. NATO is worried that its troops will be called on to do police duties, a job for which they are neither trained nor equipped.

EU foreign-policy chief Javier Solana is scheduled to meet UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to discuss the situation in Kosovo on the sidelines of a conference on Iraq in Stockholm on May 29.

If the issue is not resolved, Lyon says northern Kosovo could end up being an intractable "frozen conflict" zone -- a no-man's land similar to Georgia's separatist



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regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or Moldova's breakaway Transdniestrian province.

"It is a frozen conflict entirely," Lyon says. "That is where we are now and there is no chance in the reasonable future that we will see it resolved in favor of what the U.S. and most western Europe would like to see."