
U.S., EU OPPOSE MOVES BY KOSOVO TO SHUT DOWN WAR CRIMES COURT

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U.S. Ambassador Greg Delawie on December 22 said such a move would have "extraordinarily negative implications" for Kosovo.

"It is just a disgrace," he told reporters in Pristina. "This will be considered by the U.S. as stab in the back. Kosovo will be choosing isolation instead of cooperation."

The Kosovo Specialist Chambers court, based in The Hague, Netherlands, was established as a result of pressure by the United States and EU on Kosovo's government to hold accountable those responsible for alleged war crimes by the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) against ethnic Serbs during the war for independence.

The court's judges and prosecutors are mainly U.S., Canadian, or European, but it was established under Kosovar law, giving Pristina jurisdiction over it.

It was set up in the Netherlands to minimize the risk of witness intimidation and judicial corruption. It has yet to hear any cases.

Kosovar Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, President Hashim Thaci, and parliament speaker Kadri Veseli are former UCK commanders.

On October 9, Thaci accused the international community of failing to keep the promises made to the country in exchange for setting up the court, including a fast-track process for EU membership.

Lawmakers from the governing coalition are pressing for a vote to abolish the court. An attempt by 43 of 120 lawmakers to press the measure in parliament on December 22 failed for lack of a quorum amid an opposition boycott.

Parliament speaker Veseli said lawmakers would attempt to vote on the issue in the coming days.

Isa Mustafa, Kosovos former prime minister and the leader of the opposition Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), said the proposal was "devastating for our state and very damaging for justice."

Kujtim Shala, also of the LDK, said the move was "very dangerous" because it threatened its relations with the United States and the EU.

There was no immediate response from the Kosovar government to the U.S. ambassador's comments.

The United States has been a key ally and financial backer of Kosovo since it broke away from Serbia and then declared independence in 2008. The move was recognized by 115 countries, although not by Serbia or Russia.

The EU representative in Pristina, Nataliya Apostolova, also criticized efforts to end the court, calling it "appalling and extremely damaging."

The separate UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague convicted some Serbian military commanders for actions against ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo during Belgrade's intervention into the conflict.

An estimated 10,800 Kosovar Albanians and some 2,200 Serbs were either killed or disappeared in the war.

Kosovo is about 90 percent populated by ethnic Albanians and some 5 percent by ethnic Serbs.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/us-eu-kosovo-kla-war-crimes-liberation-army-haradinaj/28934544.html>

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