
SERBIA MUST ACCEPT KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE TO JOIN EU: GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER

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Kosovo declared independence 10 years ago, almost a decade after NATO bombed Serb forces to halt the killing and expulsion of ethnic Albanians from the region during a 1998-99 counter-insurgency war.

If Serbia wants to move toward the European Union, the building of the rule of law is a primary condition, but naturally also the acceptance of Kosovos independence, Gabriel said during a joint press conference with Kosovos Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj.

That is a central condition to take the path toward Europe.

Gabriel said he had given the same message to Serbian officials in Belgrade earlier on Wednesday.

Serbia aims to join the EU by 2025, a date set by Brussels as it looks to bring Western Balkan nations into its fold.

Serbian officials are hoping recognition of Kosovo will not be a key condition for EU membership, and the defense minister, Aleksandar Vulin, said Belgrade and Pristina should partition Kosovo.

Gabriel said his country would help to get Kosovo recognized by the five EU member states that have yet to do so - Spain, Romania, Cyprus, Greece and Slovakia.

Naturally, enabling membership of the European Union is the end goal. One of the conditions for that will be to persuade the five European Union countries which dont recognize Kosovo that such a recognition makes sense because Kosovo will never again be a part of Serbia.

Membership of the European Union is a win-win situation for all, he said.

Kosovo has been recognized by 115 countries, including 23 of the 28 EU members. Its UN membership has been blocked by Serbias allies Russia and China. Around 120,000 Serbs who live in Kosovo still consider Belgrade their capital, and they are financially supported by Serbia.

Germany, one of the first countries to recognize Kosovos independence along with the United States, France and the United Kingdom, remains one of the biggest investors in Kosovo.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-germany-serbia/serbia-must-accept-kosovo-independence-to-join-eu-german-foreign-minister-idUSKCN1FY329>

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