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## **SERBIA ON EU COURSE DESPITE CALLS FOR RUSSIA SHIFT, PM SAYS**

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New Zealand Herald (22 May 2018)

Serbia's prime minister said Monday the Balkan country's goal is to join the European Union despite calls by the defense minister for an apparent shift in course toward Russia.

Ana Brnabic said that Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin has the right to his opinion, but "we have our course and we know that our strategic goal is the EU."

Vulin, who is known for his pro-Russia stance, has said that Serbia should perhaps change its foreign policy goals if the EU insists on resolving the dispute with Kosovo as the prime condition for membership.

"If Kosovo is the key, let's go our own way," Vulin said in an official statement released by the Defense Ministry, adding that the EU is setting conditions which it knows Serbia can't fulfill.

Serbia's former province of Kosovo declared independence in 2008, which Belgrade doesn't recognize. Russia supports Serbia in that stand while major Western countries, including the U.S., have recognized Kosovo's statehood.

Serbia, Russia's key ally in the Balkans, has been reluctantly promised possible entry into the EU in 2025 if it fulfills a number of preconditions, including making peace with Kosovo Albanians.

Serbia's apparent path toward the EU has been hindered by political and propaganda pressure from Moscow and its goal of keeping the countries in the Balkan region out of NATO and other Western bodies.

Serbia has a number of pro-Russia ministers in the government who regularly try to undermine its official goal of joining the EU.

At a summit in Bulgaria earlier this month, EU leaders encouraged Serbia and other Balkan countries to continue on the path of EU-oriented reform, but were cool on any of the six joining the bloc in the near future.

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