

Tensions High as NATO Convoy Turned Away at Serb Roadblock

By [Global Research](#)

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PRISTINA — A convoy of troops from the NATO-led Kosovo peacekeeping force, KFOR, has been turned away at a roadblock in northern Kosovo set up by ethnic Serbs near a border crossing with Serbia.

Tensions in the region have been running high lately, with local Serbs [blocking main roads](#) leading to the border crossings since July to prevent the authorities of majority-ethnic-Albanian Kosovo from stretching their control over the Serb-dominated North.

KFOR had given the Serbs until October 18 to remove the crossings. The AFP news agency cited the Serb mayor of the town of Zubin Potok, whose name was not given, as confirming the KFOR convoy was stopped in the area near the Brnjak crossing and that KFOR spoke with Serb protesters and agreed to wait until October 19 before taking any action.

KFOR spokesman Uwe Nowitzki said the convoy approached the roadblock as a “test” of KFOR’s demand all roadblocks be removed.

Leaders in the northern Serb enclave, while refusing to order the barriers removed, also had urged local Serbs to pull back if KFOR moves to dismantle them.

Earlier, on October 17, residents of the town of Zubin Potok held a rally they described as a “rehearsal” for resistance. “We ask nothing from them except to be left alone, to stay and live in the state of Serbia,” Zubin Potok Mayor Salvisa Ristic told the protesters.

At a meeting with KFOR commander Erhard Drews on October 15, representatives of the four main municipalities in the region asked Drews to take no action until after an October 19 joint session of the four towns. But KFOR initially set an October 17 deadline for dismantling the barricades and later pushed it back one day to October 18.

Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Ivica Dacic said in an interview published by the Belgrade newspaper “Politika” on October 16 that the borders between Serbia and Kosovo must be redrawn if the current tensions were to be resolved peacefully. He called for an international conference to divide Kosovo, saying otherwise the region would be enslaved by a situation that “will for years eat away like a cancer at our mutual relations and the general situation in the Balkans.”

The conflict threatens to complicate Belgrade’s efforts for further integration with the European Union.

Parallel Roads

Meanwhile, in recent weeks numerous additional roads have been quietly constructed between Serbia and northern Kosovo. One by one, these new crossing points have been shut off by KFOR forces.

It remains unclear who is building the roads. Borislav Stefanovic, head of the Serbian negotiating team in Pristina, told RFE/RL that the roads were a local matter. "The municipalities are building the roads," he said. "I can't say any more than that. Every municipality has a right to build because commercial companies have the machinery."

Branko Ninic, head of the parallel structure of the municipality of Leposavic, told RFE/RL that his town was currently building two roads and that they were being funded jointly by the town and the Serbian state company Putevi Srbije (Serbian Roads). He claimed that most of the funding was coming from Serbia.

The head of the Mitrovica parallel structure, Krstimir Pantic, also said his town is building new roads and that Serbian Roads and private companies are involved. Asked why he does not pass through the checkpoint at Merdar when traveling from Serbia, Pantic said he fears having his documents confiscated by Kosovo border agents.

"I would be arrested as soon as I entered the southern part of the town since I don't have Kosovar documents," Pantic said. "They are taking away Serbian documents from Serbs."

Rada Trajkovic, an ethnic Serb and a deputy in the Kosovo Assembly, told RFE/RL that she had recently crossed the Merdar checkpoint with Serbian documents and had no problem. She said she had had no difficulties with the "Albanian" border guards.

Trajkovic added that building new roads is not a solution to the problem. "It is a useless waste of energy and effort," she said. "It's sad and, of course, a waste of money."

She added that it is hard for the impoverished region to bear. "They are spending a huge amount of money to achieve certain political goals that they think are more valuable than money," Trajkovic said.

With agency reports; RFE/RL correspondent Robert Coalson contributed to this story from Prague

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