

U.S., German leaders to recognize Kosovo

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European diplomats said the United States and Germany have agreed to recognize Kosovo's independence and call on other countries to follow suit.

U.S. President George Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were reportedly in agreement that the European Union should coordinate the recognition of independence of Serbia's mainly ethnic-Albanian Kosovo province immediately after a second round of Serbian presidential election Feb. 3, the International Herald Tribune said Friday.

Fearing Kosovo's independence declaration could strengthen and speed up similar moves in their own countries, a number of EU states, including Cyprus, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, are supporting Serbia and Russia in opposing an independent Kosovo.

But, a majority of EU states, led by Britain, Germany, France and Italy, are determined to recognize Kosovo independent of the Serbian government in Belgrade, EU diplomats said.

Slovenia, which took the six-month rotating EU presidency Jan. 1, urged the other 26 EU member states to dispatch a 1,800-person EU security mission to Kosovo to replace a U.N. civilian mission this month, before the Serbian breakaway province declares independence.

Kosovo, formally a province of Serbia, has been U.N.-governed since 1999, when NATO troops were deployed to curb ethnic Albanian-Serb conflicts.

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