

Kosovo Supports Syrian Opposition

May 15, 2012



Kosovo's Foreign Minister Enver Hoxhaj

UNITED NATIONS — Kosovo's Foreign Minister Enver Hoxhaj has voiced strong support for Syria's opposition, saying his government had already established diplomatic contacts with Syrians fighting to oust President Bashar Assad.

Hoxhaj was responding to comments by Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, who warned the UN Security Council that Kosovo should not be allowed to become a training center for rebels.

Speaking after a regular council meeting on Kosovo, a former province of Serbia, Hoxhaj made clear that Pristina was offering political support to the Syrian opposition, which is locked in a 14-month-old battle with forces loyal to Assad.

"We were among the first governments in Europe to support the opposition in Libya and in other Arab countries last year, because we were fighting for the same aspirations, for the same values," he said.

"We have the same approach to Syria and have some diplomatic contacts between my

government and [the] Syrian opposition," Hoxhaj said. "We are supporting their cause very much."

Asked whether Kosovo had established training centers for Syrian rebels, Hoxhaj said: "Not at all."

Churkin, whose country is a strong supporter of Assad and has resisted Western calls to impose sanctions on his government, made clear that Moscow was afraid that Kosovo was providing more than political advice.

"Turning Kosovo into an international training center for insurgents of various armed units could become a serious destabilizing factor, one going beyond the Balkan region," he said. "We call on international presences operating in [Kosovo] to curb such slippage."

Kosovo is not a member of the United Nations because Russia is opposed to its admission. More than 90 countries have recognized Kosovo, but Russia and Serbia are not among them.

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