

Russia Accuses West of Trying to Destabilize Macedonia

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Protesters hold a sign with a portrait of Macedonian Prime Minister Gruevski during an anti-government demonstration in front of the government building in Skopje, Macedonia, May 17.

Russia accused "Western organizers" on Saturday of trying to foment a "color revolution" in the troubled former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, where political tensions are building ahead of an opposition rally on Sunday.

"Color revolution" is a term often used to describe popular uprisings in the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine, where Moscow also accuses the West of deliberately meddling in local politics to further its interests.

In a statement on the Macedonian crisis, Russia's Foreign Ministry cited Serbian media reports about the arrest of a citizen of Montenegro accused of helping what Moscow called "Albanian extremists" operating in Macedonia.

"[This is] convincing evidence ... of attempts to push the country into the abyss of 'color revolution,'" it said.

"This is also evidence that Western organizers of such catastrophic scenarios prefer to realize them with the hands of others," the ministry said, drawing a parallel with Ukraine.

Moscow accuses the West of helping to engineer the overthrow of Ukraine's pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich after mass street protests in early 2014. He then fled to Russia.

In Macedonia, opponents of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski plan to hold a rally on Sunday to demand his resignation over wire-tap disclosures that appear to indicate widespread abuse of office by senior government officials.

The small Balkan state is also reeling from a bloody gun battle last weekend during a police raid on an ethnic Albanian neighborhood of northern Macedonia that left 18 people dead — 10 ethnic Albanians described by the government as "terrorists" and eight policemen.

The European Union and NATO have called for a transparent investigation into last week's killings.

Russia has often been critical of Western policy in the Balkans. It strongly backed the Serbs — fellow Orthodox Christian Slavs — in their conflict with their mainly Muslim ethnic Albanian minority in the 1990s.

Moscow opposed granting independence to Kosovo, formerly a Serbian province with a mainly ethnic Albanian population. Macedonia, just to the south of Kosovo, is also home to a large ethnic Albanian minority.

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