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Russia Accused of Backing Montenegro Coup

February 20, 2017



Risto Bozovic / AP

The Russian government has been accused of backing a coup in Montenegro in a bid to stop the country from joining NATO.

Special Prosecutor Milivoje Katnich claimed that the Kremlin supported a failed plot to assassinate former Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic just before the country's presidential elections last year.

Police had previously pinned the coup on "pro-Russian nationalists" who wished to replace Djukanovic with a Moscow-friendly alternative. Twenty-five people — mainly Serbian nationals — have been arrested so far on suspicion of planning to storm the country's parliament building while dressed as police officers in October 2016. Authorities are currently searching for two Russians in relation to the coup.

Katnich went a step further when he accused the Russian authorities of actively backing the

plot. “We had evidence that Russian nationalist structures were behind [the plot], but now we also know that Russian state bodies were involved at a certain level,” Katnic told local television channel RTCG on Sunday. “Russian authorities must investigate which bodies are involved and open a criminal trial.”

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Allegations of Russia's involvement in the coup had been reported by Britain's Telegraph newspaper on Sunday. The news outlet said that British government sources had also backed claims of Russian involvement in the Montenegrin coup.

The Kremlin has denied the allegations.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called the Telegraph article “another unfounded accusation against [Russians] and our country.”

He said that the allegations were merely the latest in a line of “unsubstantiated” stories, that include Russian cyber-attacks against Western institutions, interfering in U.S. elections, and cultivating ties with U.S. President Donald Trump prior to his election.

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