The Moscow Times
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Kremlin Says Kosovo Serbs' Rights 'Must Be Respected'

By AFP

May 31, 2023



People hold a giant Serbian flag during a protest in the town of Zvecan, northern Kosovo. **Bojan Slavkovic / AP Photo / TASS**

The Kremlin on Wednesday called for the rights of ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo to be respected, following clashes this week over local election results that left more than 80 people injured.

"We believe that all the lawful rights and interests of the Kosovo Serbs must be respected," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"We support Serbia and Serbs without question."

Peskov also warned against "provocative actions that could harm the rights of Serbs" and said the Kremlin was "monitoring this worrying situation."

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NATO has decided to deploy hundreds of reinforcements to strengthen Kosovo's international peacekeeping mission (KFOR) after Monday's violence in the town of Zvecan.

Hundreds of ethnic Serbs rallied outside Zvecan's town hall on Wednesday for a third consecutive day and held aloft a huge Serbian flag that stretched over 200 meters (660 feet) from the municipal building to the town center.

KFOR soldiers encircled the town hall, additionally securing the building with a metal fence and barbed wire, an AFP journalist said.

Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority boycotted local elections in the north last month, allowing ethnic Albanians to take control of local councils despite a turnout of less than 3.5%.

Many Serbs are demanding the withdrawal of Kosovo special police forces, as well as the ethnic Albanian mayors they do not consider their true representatives.

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