

## **Kosovo Resolution Prompted by Status Fears**

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The Pristina assembly's much-criticised vote on the protectorate's borders stemmed from Albanian fears that their homeland will remain part of Yugoslavia.

A fear of the being locked into Yugoslavia was behind the Pristina parliament's controversial decision last Thursday to adopt a resolution defining the protectorate's frontiers.

The move - which was condemned by the UN Security Council and the European Union, who said the assembly had no powers to issue such a ruling - was the first serious clash between Kosovars and the international community.

Yugoslavia and Macedonia were also furious with the Kosovo parliament's actions, the former asking for a UN Security Council meeting to discuss the development and the latter claiming a state of "cold war" against its neighbour.

Most Kosovo Albanians opposed last year's border agreement - which was endorsed by the Security Council - because their exclusion from the talks implied that their homeland remained part of Yugoslavia. According to strict letter of international law, the region is a constituent element of the federation, a fact that has been repeatedly challenged by Albanian politicians.

Kosovo Albanians have long been aggrieved about their absence from the frontier talks but did not have a platform to express their anger until the creation of the Kosovo parliament.

Assembly members, attempting to justify their actions, said that if they had not voted for their resolution, they would have lost all credibility amongst the electorate - although they also acknowledged the move was unlawful and risked causing friction with the international community.

The Pristina parliament claimed that the demarcation agreement between Belgrade and Skopje that was signed on January 21, 2001, was unacceptable. And it said it would not recognise the deal's ruling that 2,500 hectares of land owned by Kosovo Albanians be transferred to Macedonia.

The UN Special Representative in Kosovo, Michael Steiner, declared the assembly's resolution invalid within minutes of it being adopted. Simon Haselock, a spokesman for the UN mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, said the action was "outside the responsibility" of the parliament and "that's why it was overruled".

According to Kosovo's constitutional framework created in May 2001, international affairs, security and the rule of law fall within the remit of the UN.

Last Thursday, Steiner forwarded assembly president Nexhat Daci a security council statement reaffirming its position of March 7, 2001, that the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia "must be respected".

The EU also supported Steiner with a statement expressing concern that the assembly had overstepped its mark and challenged the authority of the Special Representative.

Steiner had earlier worked hard to deter Kosovo leaders from issuing their resolution, having reportedly spoken to Daci and Ibrahim Rugova, the newly elected president of Kosovo, among others, in an effort to get them to change their minds.

The Kosovo assembly votes risks losing the protectorate much-needed western political and economic backing. "Kosovo is not an island - it needs international support," Steiner said. "If we want to make progress," he added, "we must follow the rules".

The clash with the international community initiated a rare meeting of minds between leaders of the protectorate's Serb minority and UNMIK, possibly for the first time since the latter was established in Kosovo in 1999.

The leader of the Serb coalition Povratak (Return), Rada Trajkovic, said the resolution raised issues beyond the competence of the assembly and ordered her delegation to leave parliament during the vote. Another member of Povratak, Oliver Ivanovic, warned that it would "cause further ethnic divisions" in the region.

The first serious confrontation between Kosovo Albanians and the international community appears to spell the end of the honeymoon that has existed since Western forces entered the region in the wake of the Serb withdrawal.

Future relations between the two sides will clearly depend on whether they can find a middle way that satisfies the position of the Special Representative and the aspirations of the ethnic Albanian majority for more powers.

**Location:** Macedonia  
Kosovo

**Focus:** Balkans: Regional Reporting & Sustainable  
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