

Russian diplomat warns of rising tensions in north Kosovo

By [Global Research](#)

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A Russian diplomat in Kosovo warned on Wednesday that Serb protests in the north of the province could lead to violent clashes with ethnic Albanians.

Serbs are protesting against the return of ethnic Albanians to homes in predominantly Serb areas of Kosovska Mitrovica. The European Union's EULEX security mission is overseeing the project.

"The Serbs' protests against work to rebuild Albanians' houses have entered a second week. The Serb demonstrations are being dispersed each day by EU police forces... This situation is potentially explosive," Andrei Dronov, the head of the Russian secretariat in Pristina, told RIA Novosti.

The Serbs are demanding a ban on the return of ethnic Albanians until the same opportunity is provided to Serbs in the southern, Albanian-dominated part of the city. Kosovska Mitrovica is split into predominantly Albanian and Serb sectors by the Ibar River.

A Serb rally was dispersed by police earlier on Wednesday. No injuries have been reported. During a similar rally on Monday, one protester was injured.

"We believe the process of returning Albanian refugees has not been authorized by the Serb community, and that the reconstruction of buildings is the main cause of this negative reaction," the Russian diplomat said.

Tensions flared on April 27 when EU police, backed by the NATO-led peacekeeping force KFOR, fired teargas at Serb demonstrators attempting to enter an ethnic-Albanian area of the city.

Tear gas was also used last Thursday by NATO forces and EU police on a small gathering of around 50 Serb protesters.

On negotiations between the Serbs and the EU, Dronov said: "I do not see any serious results in this direction. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) supports the Albanian side."

Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in February 2008, and has been recognized by 58 of the 192 UN member states.

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