

Russians warn against Kosovo independence

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Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov on Friday warned that granting independence to Kosovo would open a Pandora's box for many territories that want independence.

"We are talking about how the international community respects and handles the principle of territorial integrity," Ivanov told reporters after a meeting with NATO defense ministers.

If certain rules are applied to Kosovo, other territories may also ask the international community to follow them, he argued.

"If we follow this way, we can in fact open the Pandora's box, thus leading to unpredictable circumstances."

Ivanov's view reflected differences between Russia and NATO on the final status of Kosovo, which was brought under UN administration in 1999 following the alliance's 78-day airstrike against the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under then-president Slobodan Milosevic.

NATO has repeatedly said that it fully supports the proposal of UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari, which opens way for independence of the Serbian province.

The proposal must win approval of the United Nations Security Council, where Russia enjoys the power of veto.

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