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## KOSOVO CIVIL SOCIETY PROTESTS INCREASED SERBIAN INFLUENCE



Prishtina, Kosovo: Thousands of Kosovar citizens took to the streets of Prishtina last week to protest a United Nations proposal to increase Serbia's influence in Kosovo.

The proposal, put forth by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in consultation with the Serbian government, would give Serbia broad administrative powers over Serb majority areas within the Republic of Kosovo. These would include control of the police, judiciary, transportation and infrastructure, boundaries, customs and religious sites.

Civil society groups fear that the proposal would essentially partition Kosovo by putting a third of the country's territory under Serbian control, and pave the way for the equivalent of the Bosnian Serb enclave (Republika Srpska) within Kosovo's borders.

Last week's march opposing the move was organized by more than 20 Kosovar civil society organizations, including the Kosova Women's Network (KWN), a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP). "KWN fully supports citizens in this effort, agreeing that any political decision concerning Kosovo should be made by citizens rather than imposed by outside international bodies," the group said in a statement.

The UN proposal came after Serbia refused to accept the deployment of the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in northern Kosovo, which is supposed to gradually replace the UN administration there. Serbia asserts that UN Security Council Resolution 1244, passed at the end of the 1998-1999 conflict between Serbs and Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority, only gives

the UN administrative powers in Kosovo. This resolution also refers to Kosovo as Serbia's "southern province," not as an independent state.

Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in February 2008 and has been recognized by 52 UN member states, including 22 European Union members and all bordering states except Serbia. KWN and other civil society groups contend that the new UN proposal would threaten Kosovo's territorial sovereignty, violate its constitution, and jeopardize the fragile peace that has been secured in Southeast Europe.

The protesters also point out that many Serbs who live in enclaves in Kosovo are opposed to increased Serbian governmental influence. Kosovo's constitution already guarantees Serb representation in the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, seats as Ministers and Deputy Ministers, access to media in the Serb language, representation on the Kosovo Judicial Council and national language rights. Efforts have also been made to include Serb citizens in public institutions, such as the police force.

KWN and other civil society organizations are calling for international pressure on Serbia to accept the independence of Kosovo and the deployment of the EULEX mission. They also want the Serbian government to support the Kosovo Status Settlement, proposed by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. This would grant Kosovo a flag, anthem, and the right to make international agreements and seek membership in international institutions.

Such recognition, as well as retribution for crimes committed against the citizens of Kosovo in 1998 and 1999, should be a precondition for Serbia to join the EU, they said.

- Learn more about the [Kosova Women's Network](#)