

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 4, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Anthony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
2100 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken,

We write to urge you to redouble American focus on resolving Kosovo-Serbia tensions in light of the recent escalation of hostilities between the Kosovo and Serbia governments. In the last week a disturbing situation emerged as a result of a military mobilization on the border, threatening the precarious stability in the Balkan region. Given the disproportionate strength of Serbia's armed forces, we urge you to recommit the United States to ensuring that our ally Kosovo receives fair treatment and recognition as an independent country.

On Sunday, tensions escalated when Serbian fighter jets flew close to the Kosovo-Serbia border. This most recent round of unrest was sparked by Kosovo's reciprocal ban on Serbian vehicle license plates when entering its sovereign territory – a move that Serbia has enforced for ten years on Kosovar license plates. The ban requires the driver to use temporary plates when driving across the border. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008, Serbia has refused to recognize Kosovo as an independent nation. This is reflected in an agreement, in which Serbia only allowed vehicles displaying license plates with "KS" (Kosovo) and refused entry to vehicles showing license plates with "RKS" (Republic of Kosovo).

Kosovo reciprocated Serbia's border crossing policy soon after the agreement lapsed on September 15, by imposing a fee and travel paper requirement on Serbians entering Kosovo. In retaliation, a group of Kosovar Serbs blocked two border crossings, Jarinje and Brnjak, in reprisal of the policy.¹ In addition, reports reveal that a vehicle registration office in northern Kosovo was burned to the ground and another public office was targeted by two grenades, which thankfully did not explode.² In response, the Kosovar government deployed their special police forces to ensure compliance with the new policy. Furthermore, media reports and videos indicated Serbian police and military forces mobilized along the Kosovo-Serbia border in an effort to threaten Kosovo's new policy.³ Most, if not all, of the Serbian military equipment used was provided by Russia, Serbia's closest ally. The Russian Ambassador to Belgrade, Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko, visited the border on September 26, 2021, alongside Serbian Defense Minister Nebojša Stefanović and Serbian Army Chief of Staff Milan Mojsilović, which is seen as further legitimizing and supporting Serbia's tactics.⁴

¹ RFE/RL's Balkan Service, "Kosovo Police Say Interior Ministry Offices Attacked In Volatile North," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, September 25, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-interior-ministry-attacked-serbs/31477999.html>.

² RFE/RL's Balkan Service, "Kosovo Police Say Interior Ministry Offices Attacked In Volatile North," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, September 25, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-interior-ministry-attacked-serbs/31477999.html>.

³ Insider Paper, "JUST IN Serbian Military Bring Armored Vehicles and Fly Jets near Border as Tensions Rise between Kosovo and Serbia. Kosova's PM Albin Kurti Accused Serbia of "encouraging and Supporting" Attacks on the State of Kosovo.pic.twitter.com/um6VZqSAVF," Twitter, September 25, 2021, <https://twitter.com/TheInsiderPaper/status/1441801029780185088>.

⁴ Eduart Halili, "Russian Ambassador Presence at North Border Worries Kosovo Presidency," ALBANIA DAILY NEWS, September 26, 2021, <https://albaniadailynews.com/news/russian-ambassador-presence-at-north-border-worries-kosovo-presidency>.

On September 30, an interim-agreement was brokered by the E.U. Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, Miroslav Lajčák, Chief Negotiator of Kosovo, Besnik Bislimi, and Chief Negotiator of Serbia, Petar Petković. It called for all special police forces to be removed from the border, the establishment of a working group consisting of E.U. members, and the implementation of the “sticker regime,” the requirement that the coat of arms on license plates be covered up with a stick for both Kosovars and Serbians until a more permanent solution is found.⁵ We are encouraged by the interim agreement to prevent another flare up, but we ask that you and your Administration do all that it can to support efforts that could lead to a lasting peace between Kosovo and Serbia.

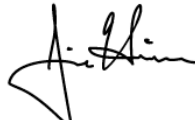
Since its independence Serbia has repeatedly sought to undermine the legitimacy and sovereignty of Kosovo. This recent military mobilization further demonstrates this continuing reality. The United States has always and must continue to stand with our ally Kosovo. We call on you to condemn the recent escalation of tensions and Serbian military mobilization, as well as encourage your Administration to join our E.U. and NATO partners in supporting the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia to find a peaceful and final resolution.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to an expeditious response given the security implications of the situation.

Sincerely,



Ritchie Torres
Co-Chair
Albanian Issues Caucus
Member of Congress



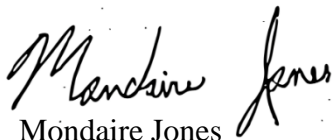
Jim Himes
Co-Chair
Albanian Issues Caucus
Member of Congress



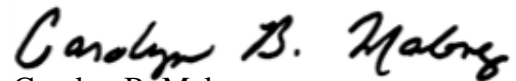
Elissa Slotkin
Albanian Issues Caucus Member
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Albanian Issues Caucus Member
Member of Congress



Mondaire Jones
Albanian Issues Caucus Member
Member of Congress



Carolyn B. Maloney
Albanian Issues Caucus
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Albanian Issues Caucus Member
Member of Congress

⁵ "Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Chief Negotiators Reach Arrangement to Resolve Tension in North of Kosovo," EEAS, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104902/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-chief-negotiators-reach-arrangement-resolve-tension-north-kosovo_en).