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Anti-independence camp gains in strength at UNSC

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Opponents of independence of Kosovo gained strength after this week's session of the UN Security Council, which saw the pro-independence camp fall down to five out of 15 members of the world's top body.

The session saw Russia's strong warning to the Kosovo Albanians, China's and Vietnam's open calls for respect of international law, as well as Indonesia's and South Africa's confirmation of the need to preserve territorial integrity.

The pro-independence camp is now composed of four of the six members of the Contact Group which are in the UNSC (US, UK, France, Italy) as well as Belgium.

The other members of the Security Council have not pronounced themselves clearly on the issue – a setback for the US which had been arguing throughout 2007 that it had a clear 11-4 majority in favor of the Ahtisaari plan.

On Wednesday, great powers once again proved unable to reach some kind of understanding over the status issue, with a pack of U.S.-led Western nations moving into muddy waters of unilateral declaration of independence and diplomatic improvisations, defined to ensure the widest possible international recognition for the internationally-administrated province.

United Nations Security Council ambassadors left the UN headquarters powerless to cope with the wide gap created between the Western camp and the Russian and Chinese firm stance that the future, sustainable solution for the crisis has to be reached through further negotiations, and finally, compromise acceptable for both Belgrade and Pristina.

In addition, those two countries warned that any kind of development in Kosovo, including a deployment of the European Union's mission has to come as a result of agreement within the Security Council – a motion which the West rejects as a waste of time.

“The Council is blocked...we are aware of the things that international community has to do...We know where the things are heading, there is no change to regard to the fact that the Council is blocked. The final status determination is very important. One way or the other, as we said for some time, this has to be dealt with,” U.S. Ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad said.



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In practical terms, western diplomats explained, Khalilzad's words mean that Kosovo Albanians have been given a green light to declare independence "at some point after the conclusion of presidential elections in Serbia", possibly by February 15, or a few weeks later if the EU decides to fulfill Spanish demand for short delay, as Madrid fears that such a move might boost popularity of Basque separatists in the country's polls scheduled for March 9.

Kosovo's newly appointed Premier Hashim Thaci, however, did not want to go deep into details of unilateral declaration of independence, saying simply that the province seems to be ready to make a decisive move, "as soon as local leaders finish some homework."

The UN itself has decided to keep silent over the Kosovo issue, leaving the controversy in hands of the Security Council ambassadors. UN diplomats said that such a decision has been taken due to the immense pressure by the EU and the U.S. on one, and Russia and China on the other side, which left Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon hanging between Kosovo's independence and protection of international law.

"Frankly speaking, I believe we have nothing to say. I believe Secretary General has nothing to say as well. We can only wait and see how it plays out and, only then, probably make a move. But, for now it is totally out of our hands," New York-based UN diplomat told KosovoCompromise.com.

Nonetheless, the Western plan could reach a series of potentially dangerous shortcomings, as Russia, backed by China said they would "never" allow Kosovo to become a member of major international institutions, including the UN, if the province, as expected, decides to go after the independence without previous consent of Belgrade.