

Commander of the United States European Command, General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services on Tuesday, March 5, 2019.

Following are excerpts from his written statement regarding the threat from Russia in Europe and, in particular, the threat Russia poses to Kosovo as it seeks to normalize relations with Serbia and works toward integrating into institutions such as NATO and the EU.

Russia

“Russia is a long-term, strategic competitor that wants to advance its own objectives at the expense of U.S. prosperity and security and that sees the United States and the NATO Alliance as the principal threat to its geopolitical ambitions. In pursuit of its objectives, Moscow seeks to assert its influence over nations along its periphery, undermine NATO solidarity, and fracture the rules-based international order. Russia actively pursues an aggressive foreign policy in violation of other nations’ sovereignty, carrying out subversive and destabilizing activities in Europe and the U.S. and exploiting opportunities to increase its influence and expand its presence in Afghanistan, Syria, and Asia.”

Balkans

“Security in the Balkans, a strategically significant region, is tenuous, and Balkan nations are a primary target of Russian malign influence. Negotiations between Kosovo and neighboring Serbia to normalize their relations and agree on a long-term solution that is viable for both countries have struggled to make progress for some time and are currently on hold. Russia fuels regional instability in an effort to prevent individual Balkan nations from progressing on a path toward greater Euro-Atlantic alignment and integration. Seeking to maintain its influence in Serbia through political, military, and economic support, Russia also opposes the recognition of Kosovo as a sovereign country. NATO’s Kosovo Force (KFOR), which includes over 3,500 troops from both NATO and non-NATO nations, plays an important role in maintaining security and stability in this region. Bosnia and Herzegovina also continues to work toward long-term peace and stability. Despite challenges from Republika Srpska, which is influenced by Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina partners with the U.S. and NATO, supporting the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.”

Link to full written statement:

https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Scaparrotti_03-05-19.pdf

Distributed by Alston & Bird on behalf of the Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. More information on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

STATEMENT

by

H.E. Ms. Vlora Çitaku,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Embassy of the Republic
of Kosovo in the United States
Washington, DC

Before United Nations Security Council Briefing on Kosovo
7 February 2019 New York

Honorable Mr. President,

Honorable members of the Security Council, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As always, I am honored to be here with you today. And it is precisely because I truly respect and value this honorable chamber, that I cannot quite comprehend why it is that we are actually here today.

Kosovo is certainly not a novelty topic for the chamber. For many people around the world, it was the war of the late 1990s that put Kosovo on the map. However, the war itself was not an isolated formative experience for my people. This war was predicated by years of oppression, segregation, and exploitation. Years when we were denied our most fundamental rights. No right to read and write our own language in schools, or to sing songs out on our streets. Years of being silenced by the deafening noise of Serbian guns. Years of tremendous suffering that only came to an end when your predecessors, sitting around this very table, two decades ago, gave a voice to me and my people.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Kosovo, we also celebrate the role that the United Nations have played in Kosovo. When one million refugees were returning back to their homes, the UN and its agencies were there, in Kosovo, waiting for them, readily offering their support. Our country has risen from the ashes of war, and it was the UN administration that lifted us up.

Throughout the many years of UN administration in Kosovo, this chamber has provided guidance and facilitated a healthy debate about Kosovo and its future. It was actually UN special envoy, Martti Ahtisaari that recommended independence as the final status for Kosovo. And it was upon Serbia's request that the International Court of Justice ruled clearly and without any ambiguity that Kosovo was within its rights when it declared independence.

I don't have to remind you that the ruling of the court was accepted by the UN General Assembly, recommending the launch of a dialogue for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With these facts in mind, I address you with the absolute candor and correctness that this forum impels, in saying that I can seriously not understand why on earth we are here for the third time in four months to talk about Kosovo again. It is astounding. Simply unbelievable, that this council has convened more sessions to talk about Kosovo, than it has for Syria, Yemen, or Venezuela.

There are real problems out there, real challenges that require your valuable time and attention. Real people who need your help, as we in Kosovo once did. It is preposterous and absolutely unacceptable that his chamber be turned into a theater by our northern neighbor. That this esteemed forum become a stage for Serbia to tell its fairytales to the world. Fictional stories that they don't even believe for themselves. It is shameful that, yet again, this chamber is being misused, purely for domestic consumption.

UNMIK has no role, and it no longer has a mandate in Kosovo. These sessions have lost their purpose. In fact, the charade that is being put on here is yet more proof that Serbia is not genuine in its articulated intent to engage in dialogue with Kosovo about the normalization of relations between our two countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The dialogue between our two countries was not, is not, and will never be about Kosovo's right to exist as a free nation under the sun. Let us not distort the facts here. Eleven years ago this month, a new and young republic was born in Europe. And Kosovo will not, never, not today, not tomorrow, we will never negotiate our statehood.

We want and we are prepared to talk about building constructive relations as neighbors. As equals. However, this is exactly where the problem lies. Serbia is inherently opposed to the idea that Kosovo is its equal. That is why they create unnecessary drama everywhere they can about anything that makes them view us as their equals. It is pervasive, we see it everywhere, we see it in sports, and arts, and politics. There is a stubborn refusal to accept us as their peers.

But, frankly speaking, that is Serbia's problem. What I cannot understand is why we have to meet here so often and entertain their ideas about a parallel universe that they chose to live in. It is peculiarly incumbent upon you, the members of this forum who have strength to set an example of propriety to stop enabling this parody.

Always, every single day, Serbia continues to create artificial drama in order to avoid accepting reality. We have gotten rather used to it. It is hard for them to surprise us with their absurdity anymore. However, if they think they can condition the dialogue with us relinquishing our right to exist as a sovereign state, they are in for a fast approaching awakening. We are not going to freeze our existence until Serbia has an epiphany and decide it is time to accept Kosovo as an equal.

First, less than two months ago, we were summoned here for an extraordinary session to urgently address the most natural and ordinary of decisions that our institutions undertook when we established our army. The decision to establish the army was a legal, constitutional, and prudent

obligation to create the requisite security mechanisms that will enable Kosovo to contribute and be part of the regional and Euro-Atlantic security alliances. Furthermore, it is a decision which demonstrates the maturity of Kosovo as a state. It is a paradigm shift of no small proportions for us to transform from consumers, to contributors of security.

Now, they are conditioning the continuation of the dialogue with the removal of tariffs.

Honorable members of this chamber,

The decision of our Government to impose tariffs on Serbian goods was not a decision that we took lightly. However, the question at hand should be why that decision was made in the first place. The tariffs were a direct response to the aggressive and brutal campaign of the Serbian Government against Kosovo. One cannot use one hand to fight our existence with everything that they have at their disposal, and extend the other one with the pretense of being earnest about normalization and good neighborly relations. In addition, political arguments aside, this decision was based on economic factors as well. No product that is labeled made in Kosovo can pass the Serbian border. None whatsoever. Why should Kosovo extend Serbia a courtesy that they do not reciprocate?

Ladies and gentlemen,

The tariffs are not the problem. The tariffs are merely an excuse to refuse to come and sit with us at the table in Brussels. At the end of the day, the real economic effect of these tariffs is minimal. It is negligible for Serbia.

Dear colleagues,

Serbia exports weapons all around the world, even to countries that are under EU and US embargo, and they sell cookies to Kosovo. Only 3% of Serbia's exports are to Kosovo. There is no humanitarian crisis of any kind in Kosovo. Please come and visit Kosovo for yourselves, and you will witness the unquestionable reality with your own eyes.

The bottom line is, Serbia will use any excuse that they can find and make up more that they don't have only to delay the inevitable. The recognition of Kosovo as a free and independent state. All the excuses and all the delays do not alter the fact that Kosovo is free nation. Hence, dialogue should not be conditioned with excuses. Because, at the end of the day, Kosovo actually has real and painful reasons to condition the process. We have 20,000 reasons, for each of the women that were raped by Serbian military forces. We have 1,370 more, for each of the children that were killed in Kosovo by Serbian military forces. We have 1,600 reasons, for each and every one of the people who are still missing today.

Even here today we had attempts to rewrite history. The war in the Balkans, massacres from Srebrenica to Recak and Izbica had one perpetrator. Serbia. Belgrade. We all now who the perpetrators were. And we know the victims.

KLA was not a criminal or terrorist organization. It was a liberation movement. They were young women and men that took up arms to fight Milosevic. We are proud of them.

Yet, Kosovo has never conditioned the dialogue process, because for us, building a prosperous Kosovo, at peace with its neighbors is the best way to honor the sacrifice that was made. And though our scars may never fully heal, we will not be hostages of our pain.

Instead of ceasing this opportunity for redemption and peace, Serbia chooses obstruction. Even if the government of Kosovo were to suspend the tariffs, Serbia will find some other excuse to inhibit the process. What is their excuse for the lack of implementation of almost everything that we have agreed to in Brussels? What is their excuse for the lack of the implementation of the agreement on energy? What about the agreement for the recognition of diplomas? What is their excuse? None. The truth is, ladies and gentlemen, that until the day that Serbia recognizes Kosovo as its equal, our part of the world will sadly keep producing endless and pointless drama and conflict.

The most recent iteration regards a legitimate and constitutional decision of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo about the Trepça mines. Belgrade's reaction to this decision revealed in the most blatant and brutal form the true neocolonial attitude that Serbia harbors vis-a-vis Kosovo. Kosovo will not negotiate with Belgrade about Trepça or any other of our resources. They are in Kosovo, and they belong to the people of Kosovo. The times when decisions about our resources were made in Belgrade ended a long time ago.

Serbia needs to want peace. They need to want an agreement. If they truly do, then they need to act on it. Our Serbian citizens in Kosovo are the ones that are suffering the most in this situation. And make no mistake, there is only one government that exercises pressure on them. That is the one sitting in Belgrade, not the one in Prishtina. Any member of the Kosovo Serbian community who dares to think differently or independently of the government in Belgrade is subject to systematic intimidation.

From hand grenades thrown at the homes of Serbian members of the KSF, to the detention of Serbian MPs who dared to challenge the government in Belgrade, Serbia has left no stone unturned in its attempts to obstruct the integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo. Belgrade does not view them as people who need their support. Belgrade only views and uses Serbs in Kosovo as instruments for their destabilizing foreign policy. And we have seen similar scenarios in Bosnia and Hercegovina as well.

Just the last session that we gathered here, we all demanded progress in the investigation on the assassination of Oliver Ivanovic. The Kosovo Police and other law enforcement mechanisms worked hard to bring the perpetrators of this heinous crime to justice. Arrests were made. But, lo and behold the irony, the main suspect is in hiding. In Serbia. And Serbia is refusing to hand him over to the Kosovar authorities. I will refrain from commenting any further on this matter and allow you to make up your own minds as to what this means.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we prepare to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Kosovo, I cannot help but reflect on the future. Regardless of the roadblocks and despite all the obstacles that we face, we remain determined to do all that is in our power to achieve and cherish a stable and lasting peace. For the sake of our children, our athletes, our artists, our scientists, who are undaunted by the temporary constraints of our current circumstance. They transcend the borders of prejudice

and the scale the walls of politics to raise our flag around the world. For the sake of our brave women who challenge the status quo to transform social norms and break glass ceilings. For the sake of the fallen, who made the ultimate sacrifice. We continue to strive for a better tomorrow. And even though we still have a long way to go, I am just as hopeful for our young republic today as I was on June 12th, 1999 when Kosovo was liberated from Serbia.

Dear members of the Security Council,

It is time for Serbia to liberate itself from Kosovo now. For the sake of peace and stability in the region. We all must show courage and end this conflict. Kosovo is ready.

Thank you for your time and attention!

*Distributed by Alston & Bird on behalf of the Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
More information on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC*