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October 30, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express our concern regarding Serbia's recent military buildup on its border with Kosovo and to urge the United States to support the restoration of productive diplomacy between Kosovo and Serbia. The actions the United States has taken thus far to publicly warn about and call for a reduction of Serbian troops are important steps, and we applaud ongoing efforts to deescalate tensions. Without sustained U.S. diplomatic, economic, and political pressures to stem the rising violence in northern Kosovo, however, we fear the situation will worsen and destabilize the Western Balkan region.

Last month, in one of the worst episodes of violence since the 1999 Kosovo War, heavily armed Serb gunmen belonging to a paramilitary group ambushed a Kosovo Police patrol in northern Kosovo, resulting in the death of a Kosovo Police sergeant. After the unprovoked attack, Kosovo Police forces engaged the gunmen at a nearby Serbian Orthodox monastery, resulting in the deaths of three Serb gunmen.¹ This violence has led to greater instability in the region in the subsequent weeks which has been exacerbated by increased Serbian troop movement and long-standing ethnic tensions. In the immediate aftermath, the United States took swift action to publicize and decry Serbia's efforts to militarize the border, and since then, Serbia has claimed to have recalled most of its troops.² This is an extremely tenuous situation, and we believe increased troop movement portends future conflict. Further, Serbia's behavior is all too similar to the irrevocable actions Russia took against Ukraine before the start of the Russian invasion.

Kosovo is an important democratic partner to the United States and has taken important strides to bolster its democratic institutions in recent years. Working in partnership with civil society, Kosovo's parliament has made great progress developing as a participatory, transparent, and accountable institution, serving as an example in the Western Balkans. Earlier this year, the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) held a technical assistance program with Kosovar Members of Parliament on establishing a code of ethics for members, a process that was finalized through their legal committee in September of this year. Additionally, in September, Kosovo joined the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative aimed at securing concrete commitments from countries to promote open government, empower citizens, and fight corruption to strengthen governance. Kosovo has shown great

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/one-police-officer-killed-another-injured-kosovo-gunfire-pm-kurti-2023-09-24/>

² <https://apnews.com/article/serbia-kosovo-army-troops-crisis-buildup-banjska-86e06ff6cc52cb214d789e595540d552>

willingness to strengthen its democratic institutions and has become a key regional democracy with which HDP is proud to work with.

We strongly believe the region is inching closer to crisis and we are dedicated to maintaining Kosovo's vibrant democracy in the Western Balkans. U.S. investments in Kosovo's civil society and governance have made a tangible impact and we must protect these investments for the future.

With this in mind, we request an update on concrete, actionable steps the Biden Administration is taking to prevent conflict in Kosovo's northern region and protecting Kosovo's democratic institutions. These include:

- Providing a comprehensive and detailed strategy the Department of State will adhere to, with consideration to the dynamic situation in Kosovo.
- Confirmation of the number of Serbian troops along the Kosovo-Serbia border.
- Providing information on actions the United States has taken since September 24, 2023, to reduce tensions in Kosovo's northern region and support Kosovo's efforts to investigate any structures or individuals involved in planning or carrying out the attack.
- Actively affirming U.S. support for civil society as well as renewed parliamentary engagement, particularly on the issue of normalizing Kosovo-Serbia relations.

We appreciate your commitment and attention to Western Balkan issues and support for global democratic governance. As members of the House Democracy Partnership, we stand ready to work with you to support effective, independent, and responsive legislatures around the world.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress
Chairman, House Democracy Partnership



Dina Titus
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, House Democracy Partnership