

Russian humanitarian convoy blocked on Kosovo border

by Timur Blokhin and Igor Goikovic

The Russian convoy which is to deliver 285 tons of humanitarian aid to Kosovo Serbs remains blocked on the demarcation line between Serbia and the Kosovo province. On Tuesday afternoon, the representatives of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, (EULEX) halted a convoy with Russian humanitarian aid for Kosovo Serbs.

The border guards let two trucks enter Kosovo but after that EULEX ordered them to halt the third truck for custom formalities. These formalities, in particular, implied that the Russian trucks should be convoyed by EULEX representatives to enter the territory of Kosovo.

In response Serbs blocked 11 cars with EULEX representatives who were on the way to Jarinje. According to Alexander Konuzin, Russia's ambassador in Serbia, who is heading the convoy, Pristina laid it down as a condition either the trucks go to Kosovo's Mitrovica convoyed by EULEX or they turn back and go to the administrative center of Merdare, where is Kosovo custom checkpoint is located.

Konuzin told EULEX representatives that he had not asked them to convoy the trucks with humanitarian aid. He also said that the Russian convoy would not go to Merdare because this checkpoint is controlled by Pristina authorities, which neither Serbia nor Russia recognize as a legitimate government.

It should be noted here that if the Russian convoy passes through customs in Merdare it can be taken as an indirect recognition of Kosovo's independence by Russia.

Meanwhile, Peter Feith, the representative in Pristina of the US and the 22 EU countries that recognize Kosovo, said he did not understand why the Russian ambassador should go to the north of Kosovo if there is a Russian representative in Pristina. Feith recommended the Russian embassy to follow the rules and to agree on cargo delivery with Pristina authorities. But he forgot to mention an important detail: the Russian office in Pristina is part of the Russian embassy in Belgrade and Alexander Konuzin is the ambassador on the entire territory of Serbia including Kosovo, which Moscow regards as an integral part of Serbia.

By the way, Peter Feith says he does not see any humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. At the same time, according to the Serbian Red Cross' report, about 30,000 people in Kosovo, which is one fifth of the regional population really need such an aid, Vesna Milenovic, the secretary general of this organization, said in an interview with the Voice of Russia:

"We see no reasons not to let the humanitarian convoy enter Kosovo. We received humanitarian aid from Russia several times and it was always in the right time, Milenovic continues. According to her, the current aid was put together considering the current needs of the population. It contains flour, sugar, canned meat products, hygiene means and all this is really needed. It is winter now and people's humanitarian needs are growing. That is why they also need electric heaters as well as portable power generators, which will be installed in the organizations where they are especially needed."

And here is a statement from Mileta Babovic, General Secretary of the Association of Serbia's economic executives, which also collects humanitarian aid for Kosovo Serbs:

"This humanitarian aid is very important now - it is not clear how the situation in the region will develop. The talks between Belgrade and Pristina are likely to last long. Meanwhile our citizens in Kosovo still live in conditions of total instability when one day you have a land plot and a house and next day Albanians come and take it away from you."

Russia's Emergency Ministry and Russia's envoy inn NATO Dmitry Rogozin have already called the actions of the EU representatives who halted Russia's convoy on the border with to Kosovo as "humanitarian crime". On Wednesday the Russian leadership plans to raise this issue at the EU-Russia summit in Brussels.

14.12.2011 Radio The Voice of Russia
<http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/12/14/62216503.html>