



Russia "astonished" by Obama's version of Kosovo UDI

March 28, 2014

MOSCOW -- Russia said on Friday it was "astonished" by a statement made by U.S. President Barack Obama concerning the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence.

Obama told a gathering in Brussels earlier this week that the ethnic Albanian proclamation, made in 2008, was preceded by "a referendum," and that this referendum was carried out "in cooperation with the UN and neighboring countries."

Obama's speech was meant to accuse Russia of distorting the facts related to Crimea when that country cited the Kosovo case as a precedent.

The UDI, made by the assembly of its southern province, was rejected by Serbia as unconstitutional, while Russia refused to recognize it. The United States, however, were among the first countries to recognize the territory as independent.

"Kosovo only left Serbia after a referendum was organized not outside the boundaries of international law, but in careful cooperation with the United Nations and with Kosovo's neighbors. None of that even came close to happening in Crimea," the U.S. president said in his speech at Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

He also said that NATO's 1999 war against Serbia was launched "only after the people of Kosovo were systematically abused and killed for years."

"This claim on the part of the U.S. president causes astonishment since there was no plebiscite in Kosovo, all the more so a plebiscite coordinated with the international community," the Russian Foreign Ministry said, and added:

"A decision of breaking away from Serbia was taken by 'parliament' in Priština in 2008. However, we can only agree that fateful decisions should be taken through referendums, the way it was done in Crimea, not in private."

Several western analysts and experts on the Balkans also reacted to Obama's statement, including James Ker-Lindsay of the London School of Economics, who qualified it as "an incredible

mistake," and noted that "an unofficial" independence referendum had been organized by ethnic Albanians - but that it took place in 1991, and that only one country, Albania, recognized its results.

Cato Institute's Ted Galen Carpenter told Tanjug that Obama's statement was a regrettable attempt at distorting history, "especially given that the initial territorial amputation of Kosovo from Serbia was carried out in 1999 by the U.S. and their NATO allies." This analyst also noted that this act was accompanied by "a shaky facade of international approval after the fact."

The orchestration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, Carpenter stressed, represented an arrogant instance of bypassing the UN Security Council, in violation of previous UN resolutions.