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## **PQ praises Canada's recognition of Kosovo Serbian ambassador recalled. Ottawa had previously remained on the fence over the issue because of Quebec sensitivity**

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QUEBEC - The Parti Québécois seized on the federal government's decision yesterday to recognize Kosovo as an independent state, seeing a parallel with its own goal of making Quebec a country independent of Canada.

"We are happy because in recognizing the political independence of Kosovo, Canada is recognizing the entry, legally and democratically, of this new independent state into the international community," said **Daniel Turp**, the party's international relations critic in a statement.

PQ leader Pauline Marois was not available to reporters, but François Gendron, the party's house leader in the National Assembly, said Kosovo could be an example for Quebec.

"I say bravo, sincerely," Gendron said, commenting on Canada's decision to recognize the breakaway Serbian province.

Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence is an illustration of "the liberty of people to assume what I want for Quebec," he added.

Nations have an "innate, fundamental" right to self-determination, Gendron added, and Canada has recognized Quebec as a nation but "without meaning anything."

A spokesperson for Monique Gagnon-Tremblay, Quebec's international relations minister, said the decision falls within federal jurisdiction.

"We were not consulted," Damir Croteau said. "There will be no comment."

**Turp** congratulated the Kosovars when they declared independence Feb. 17, noting since 1990, 20 countries have become independent, naming Montenegro, Slovakia and the former republics of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

In Ottawa, Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier said yesterday Canada would "join the international community" in recognizing the sovereign independence of the Balkan republic, citing Canada's commitment under NATO and the UN to protect Kosovo.

"It's why today, in this context, that Canada acknowledges the new international reality and will recognize Kosovo as an independent state," he said.

In response, the Serbian ambassador in Ottawa, Dusan Batakovic, has been temporarily recalled to Belgrade.

According to Bernier, Canada wanted to ensure it fully understood the situation before making any announcement about the status of Kosovo.

"It was important for us, in the beginning, to assess the situation on the ground," he said. "It's an important decision for a country, when you have to recognize another country. We took our time and now we're ready to do it."

As for the withdrawal of the Serbian ambassador, Bernier said the move was not unexpected.

"We're not surprised about that. It's their (Serbia's) decision," he said.

The foreign affairs minister referred to Kosovo as a special case, because of the past conflict with its neighbours. He denied it had any similarity to a claim for Quebec sovereignty.

"It's a unique case and as a declaration issued by Kosovo's parliament also makes clear, and this is what's important for us, the unique circumstances which have led to Kosovo's independence mean it does not constitute any kind of precedent," he said.

Canada had previously remained on the fence over the issue, mainly because of sensitivity over the historical standoff with Quebec separatists and a rising concern in Ottawa that a declaration had provoked the beginnings of a major East-West split.

The Serbian ambassador expressed his disappointment with the Canadian decision yesterday.

"This is a precedent set in a very dangerous way. We are very unhappy because we consider Canada a friendly country, with 200,000 Serb-Canadians living here and giving a great contribution to our bilateral relations," Batakovic said.

Batakovic disagreed with Bernier on the similarities between Kosovo and Quebec, however. The ambassador pointed to the Clarity Act and the defined conditions under which a province could secede from Canada.

"The Canadian Clarity Act, which defines how Quebec can become independent, has its counterpart documents in both Serbian and international law," Batakovic said.

"The clarity act for Kosovo is the Serbian constitution and UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which defines Kosovo solely as an integral part of Serbia with the right to enhanced autonomy and nothing more."

The ambassador said Canada would regret its decision. He denied Serbia would retaliate diplomatically, but acknowledged that a significant breakdown relations would probably occur.

"We are a democratic country and we will not use retaliation," Batakovic said. "It is sad that the growing economic exchange between Canada and Serbia might slow down and that many very useful bilateral initiatives will suffer."

Kosovo's ethnic Albanian-dominated parliament unilaterally declared independence from Serbia on Feb. 17. Since then, about 30 countries have recognized its independence.