

Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said Belgrade does not accept the Kosovo government's decision to put the huge ex-Yugoslav Trepca mining complex under Pristina's control.

Vucic said on Tuesday that the Serbian government rejected Pristina's decision to put the Trepca complex in the Serb-majority north of Kosovo under its control.

"This mining complex is vital for the survival of Serbs in the north of Kosovo... For us, this decision is null and void," Vucic told a press conference in Belgrade.

"The right of ownership must be protected. We will not let the Albanians do this and we will not seek arbitration because that would mean that we recognise Kosovo as a state," he told media, without concretely stating what Belgrade's next steps would be.

Serbia "will not let down its people in Kosovo", Vucic added, warning the Kosovo authorities not to take over any of the mine's property by force.

Kosovo's parliament adopted a law on Friday under which the Trepca mining and industrial processing complex was transformed into a shareholding company, in which the Kosovo government will control 80 per cent of the shares, while 20 per cent will remain the property of its workers.

"The mineral resources are the property of the Republic of Kosovo and with this law Trepca's assets are and will remain in Kosovo," Kosovo Prime Minister Isa Mustafa told parliament on Friday, Reuters news agency reported.

The takeover was approved despite protests by opposition MPs in Pristina, Serb members of the Kosovo cabinet, Kosovo Serb miners, and Belgrade.

Kosovo opposition parties complained about the time made available to study the draft legislation before the first reading.

Kosovo Serb miners meanwhile blocked the road between Pristina and Raska in southern Serbia last Thursday in protest against the draft law.

The lead, zinc and silver mine complex, which was once Kosovo's most profitable conglomerate during the Yugoslav period, is split along ethnic lines.

The northern part of the complex employs workers from the Serb-majority north of Kosovo, and is run by Belgrade.

The southern part employs Kosovo Albanian workers and is under the control of authorities in Pristina.

Due to the dispute over its ownership, the mine has only been working at low capacity, has built up large debts, and is facing bankruptcy.

Serbia and Kosovo are engaged in ongoing talks in Brussels, under EU supervision, aimed at normalising relations between Belgrade and Pristina. The talks include the issue of disputed

ownership of property in Kosovo.  
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