
BORDER DEAL CONFIRMATION ANGERS KOSOVO OPPOSITION

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Opposition parties in Kosovo expressed anger after an ad-hoc international commission on Wednesday approved the controversial border demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro.

The opposition has rejected the agreement, claiming that the country stands to lose more than 8,000 hectares of land under the terms. Opposition parties vowed to continue to "defend the territory of Kosovo".

The findings of the experts hired by President Atifete Jahjaga have upset the opposition parties, which for months have blocked the work of parliament because of the agreement and and because of another agreement with Serbia on the formation of an autonomous Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo.

"We respect everyone but Kosovo is Kosovo and we alone will determine the border," one of the opposition leaders, Ramush Hardinaj, said.

After the two weeks of work, the three international experts, Fletcher Burton, Herbert Wilmes and Fred Newton, on Wednesday submitted their report containing their assessment of the deal with Montenegro.

The international experts have not found any violations in the Kosovo-Montenegro demarcation process and are of the opinion that... the process adheres to international standards," Jahjaga said.

The President added that commission had only agreed that the demarcation process should have been more transparent, as required by European practice, including familiarizing the public with the process, laws, maps and other findings.

US expert Burton said border disputes can be difficult, but, From a legal perspective, the process of the commission's work has been worthwhile," he said.

I call upon the institutions of Kosovo and the political spectrum to reflect and take into consideration these assessments and recommendations," Jahjaga said.

However, the opposition said Kosovo's border can only be determined by a more credible

committee, including international experts, but not by an expert group made up of only three persons.

The US embassy welcomed the determination of the commission that the border delineation process clearly satisfied international norms.

"We concur with the Commissions call for Kosovo and Montenegro to take steps to improve border management and strengthen cooperation. We hope that all sides will carefully review the reports findings and return to the important work required to advance Kosovo on its path towards Euro-Atlantic institutions," the embassy said.

For Montenegro, the agreement on demarcation with Kosovo is a "done deal" and the Interior Ministry is set to begin a two-year process of marking the border with Kosovo.

The ministry confirmed to BIRN that a meeting of Montenegro's Demarcation Commission and the ad hoc International Commission on Friday in the capital, Podgorica, will review the process of preparing an agreement on the border.

"The reasons for the formation and mandate of the ad-hoc International Commission was not to review an already signed agreement or to consider its essence but only to check the negotiation process of demarcation between Kosovo and Montenegro," the ministry told BIRN.

The International Commission had now examined the documentation and the result, the ministry said, was a positive assessment of the whole process and the conclusion of the demarcation deal.

The chair of the Montenegrin Demarcation Commission, Milan Paunovic, said the border would finally be marked in two years' time.

He added that a joint Montenegro-Kosovo commission would correct certain parts of the line so that locals' properties and land are not split between the two countries.

Following several opposition protests in Pristina, the US State Department in December said that following a review of maps from the 1940s to the present, including those used by the commission demarcating the border, the recently-delimited border closely aligns with the border as defined by the former Yugoslav state's 1974 Constitution.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/experts-give-green-light-on-kosovo-border-deal-03-30-2016>

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