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## **KOSOVO GOVT FRETS AS MONTENEGRO BORDER DEAL VOTE NEARS**

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The Kosovo Assembly is set to vote on the controversial agreement on border demarcation with Montenegro on Tuesday at a session that starts at 4pm, but a few hours before the deal is sent to MPs, it remains unclear if the ruling coalition can ensure it has 80 votes to ratify it.

The agreement, which has been one of the issues to put the country in political deadlocks over the last three years, needs to be backed by a two-thirds majority - 80 out of 120 MPs.

The ruling coalition with 39 votes is supported by the opposition Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK, Alliance New Kosovo and Alternative with 29 votes, plus 10 votes from non-Serb community MPs in parliament.

After MP Donika Kadaj-Bujupi left the opposition Vetevendosje to join Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, AAK, the ruling coalition might be able to count on her vote too, but Kadaj-Bujupi has not given any statement about whether she still opposes the agreement as she did when she was with Vetevendosje.

Kadaj-Bujupi was one of the opposition MPs indicted for letting off tear gas in parliament to oppose a previous vote on the demarcation.

With 78 votes on table, excluding Kadaj-Bujupi, the ruling coalition is counting on the vote of Adem Hodza from the Serb party Srpska Lista, whose MPs have officially stated they will not back the deal.

However, another complication appeared for the ruling coalition after Ramiz Kelmendi, an MP from the Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK, which is part of the coalition, told a local TV station on Monday evening that he will not be at the parliamentary session to vote due to some threats.

I had personal threats to my family members too, Kelmendi, who comes from the disputed area near the border with Montenegro, told T7 television.

The European Union has set ratification of the agreement as the main condition before it will grant Kosovo nationals visa-free access to the passport-free Schengen area.

Citing a report by the NGO Kosovo Democratic Institute that said that the young people want visa liberalisation, the US ambassador to Pristina, Greg Delawie, called on MPs to ratify the agreement.

Kosovo MPs should pass Border Demarcation now and show they are listening to these serious concerns, Delawie wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

Opponents of the deal argue that Kosovo is giving up too much land to Montenegro.

The Kosovo Assembly failed to proceed to a vote on February 28 after the government failed to stack up the necessary numbers.

A previous attempt to ratify the border demarcation agreement failed on February 22, after the government decided to turn the vote into a package, by including two additional documents.

One was a report by a state commission, which concluded that the border deal was damaging to Kosovo. The other was the joint statement of the presidents of Kosovo and Montenegro.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-to-vote-the-controversial-agreement-demarcation-timeline-03-19-2018>

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