
KOSOVO SAYS ALBANIA IS STALLING OVER FREE TRADE

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Kosovo's Minister of Trade, Bajram Hasani, told BIRN in an interview that Kosovo wants to scrap taxes between Kosovo and Albania for local producers and create a joint national market □ but that Albania was stalling on the idea.

We agreed with officials in Albania for a national strategy on a joint market, Hasani said. However, according the minister, Albania's government has yet to take any concrete steps to make such a plan happen.

Albanian institutions do not have the same sensitivity towards Kosovo that we have for them, he said, adding that, except for the will to work in this direction, nothing is being implemented.

After meeting manufacturers from both countries, Bajrami said it was agreed that the initiative should start with those producers who export most between the two countries.

We agreed to identify 20 producers, ten from Kosovo and ten from Albania, that export more in both countries and open the market for their products by exempting them from taxes * to have an unified market for local producers, Hasani said. However, Albanias institutions do not work enough in this regard, he lamented.

According to Hasani, the most important thing is that both the Kosovo Manufacturing Club and the Union of Albanian Producers remain interested in pushing this initiative forward.

Astrit Panxha, head of the Kosovo Manufacturing Club, told BIRN that according to data from 2017, Albania exported about 150 million euros worth of goods to Kosovo. Kosovo exported far less to Albania - amounting to about 35 million euros.

It is evident that Albanian products penetrate the Kosovo market much more easily than Kosovar products do in the Albanian market, Panxha said.

The Kosovo Manufacturing Club said the most challenging trade barriers are in agricultural products, such as cases where reports on quality assurance issued by the relevant Kosovo laboratories are not recognised by the Albanian authorities.

Panxha said it should be noted that the Kosovo Manufacturing Club supports any agreement or initiative that encourages producers and facilitates trade between Kosovo and Albania.

We believe producers are the best promoters of economic development in both countries, so they should be offered the right conditions to build a complementary economy that helps one another,

Panxha said.

Kosovo's parliament last week backed a resolution supporting unification of customs with Albania.

The resolution requires the government to start constitutional and legal procedures for an international agreement on opening the border crossing points for the free movement of people who are citizens of Kosovo and Albania.

This resolution needs to be voted on by the Albanian parliament before it can take effect, however.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-wants-a-joint-national-market-with-albania-06-11-2018>

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