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## **SERBIA PROPOSES TERRITORIAL SWAP WITH KOSOVO**

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Al Jazeera (26 July 2018)

Serbia has raised the prospect of a new deal with neighbouring Kosovo, which seceded from Serbia 10 years ago, that could see the two countries draw up new zones and swap chunks of territory.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that if such a "demarcation" agreement was not put in place, Albanians could spread out throughout Serbia in the coming years due to their high birth rates, in comments published in Serbian media on Thursday.

Vucic's suggestions could see North Kosovo, which is mainly populated by Serbians, handed over to Belgrade. In exchange, the region surrounding the southern Serbian town of Presevo, which is mostly populated by Albanians, could be transferred to Kosovo.

The influential Serbian Orthodox Bishop Teodosije, who presides over Kosovo, has warned against such a division, as the small Serb minority living in central Kosovo would then increasingly emigrate.

In an interview for Croatian news magazine Globus published on Wednesday, Vucic said that he will try to retrieve as much territory as possible.

"All Serbs know that they lost Kosovo, but I will try everything in my might to retrieve what I can, so that in the end it's not a total defeat or total loss," Vucic told Globus.

Put more simply, Serbia would recognise Kosovo ("but without explicit international recognition") in exchange for northern Kosovo rejoining Serbia, wrote Globus journalist Darko Hudelist.

Last week Vucic and Kosovo President Hashim Thaci met Frederica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs for talks for the second time in two months, with the aim of reaching a legally binding agreement between the two countries.

"It was a short meeting, not an easy one. It was very difficult, possibly the shortest and the toughest of all meetings that we had in the last six years," Thaci said in a press conference following the meeting.

With proposals of territory swaps circulating, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj rejected the notion, saying that partition of Kosovo would mean "war".

"Division for me is war. I say this without hesitation and it is dangerous to talk about division," Haradinaj told Kosovar TV on July 19, as reported by Balkan Insight.

"There is no division, no exchange of territories, movement of the borders. It is dangerous; it cannot be done under these circumstances," Haradinaj said.

Kosovo split from Serbia 10 years ago after Albanians, who make up a majority in the territory, launched a rebellion against oppression.

A heavy-handed response and an indiscriminate campaign against the population prompted NATO to intervene against Serbia in March 1999, in an operation that ended with the removal of Belgrade's forces three months later.

Though it lost control over the territory, Belgrade continues to claim sovereignty over Kosovo and Serbian leaders have vowed never to recognise Kosovo's independence.

Serbia, backed by Russia, is blocking Kosovo's promotion to UN membership.

More than 110 countries recognize Kosovo as an independent state.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2018/07/serbia-proposes-territorial-swap-kosovo-180726111410291.html>

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