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## **KOSOVO PRESIDENT SAYS WANTS TO "CORRECT" BORDER WITH SERBIA**

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Reuters (14 August 2018)

Hashim Thaci told Reuters in an interview that he would present his plan to Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic when they meet in September in Brussels as part of a dialogue sponsored by the European Union.

Normalizing bilateral relations is a key condition for both Serbia and Kosovo to advance towards their eventual goal of EU membership. The Balkan neighbors agreed in 2013 to resolve all pending issues but have so far made little progress.

Definitely now is the moment to correct the border between Kosovo and Serbia, which is around 400 kilometers (250 miles) long, Thaci said.

This would help avoid inter-ethnic problems and creating any sort of autonomous region such as the Serb Republic (in Bosnia).

Thaci did not say what Serbia might receive in return for giving up such territory - home to about 55,000 ethnic Albanians - and rejected any partition of Kosovo along ethnic lines.

Correcting borders will definitely avoid Kosovo's partition, swapping territories, more crises or problems or even possibly a new war, he said.

### **EU PERSPECTIVE**

Kosovo, whose population of 1.8 million is mainly ethnic Albanian, declared independence from Belgrade in 2008, a decade after NATO bombed rump-Yugoslavia to end the killing of Albanian civilians by Serb forces during a two-year insurgency.

It is now recognized by more than 100 nations but not by Serbia, Russia and five EU states. Belgrade and Moscow have blocked Kosovo from joining the United Nations.

Some Serbian media and politicians have suggested redrawing the border to bring a part of northern Kosovo populated mainly by Serbs into Serbia and in return to give parts of southern Serbia with an Albanian majority to Kosovo.

Around 100,000 Serbs live in Kosovo, half of them north of the Ibar River in towns where they form a majority. The rest lives south of the river in areas with an Albanian majority.

A majority of the Serbs living in Kosovo do not recognize that countrys institutions and still regard Belgrade as their capital.

Vucic suggested last week he was prepared to compromise on defining Serbias borders with Kosovo, though observers say the two sides remain far apart. Most Serbs view Kosovo as the cradle of their nation and Orthodox Christian faith.

Western countries are also uneasy about any redrawing of borders in the Balkans.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Monday that the territorial integrity of Western Balkan states was sacrosanct.

The British embassy in Pristina said calls for re-drawing national borders could be de-stabilising.

But Thaci said he was confident that Western countries would support any agreement signed between him and Vucic, which he believes can be reached by February 2019.

If the parties agree in the process of the dialogue and they reach an agreement, the EU and the United States will support any deal on border correction, Thaci said.

We are following a peaceful process and this will avoid problems, avoid crises and will open an EU perspective for both countries.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-president/kosovo-president-says-wants-to-correct-border-with-serbia-idUSKBN1KZ1O4>

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