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## **DELAYS IN KOSOVO TALKS COULD DESTABILIZE BALKANS, SERBIA'S PRESIDENT SAYS**

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Reuters (21 March 2019)

Twenty years after NATO bombed the now-defunct Yugoslavia to halt Serbias brutal crackdown on Albanians in Kosovo, its former southern province, talks are stalled.

Albanian-majority Kosovo declared independence in 2008 and won recognition from the United States and most EU countries, but not Serbia or its big power patron Russia, and some 4,000 NATO troops remain to safeguard peace in the tiny country.

Both countries must fully normalize ties, before either could progress further on their way to join the European Union.

Every day of delays could create conditions in which one spark could set the region on fire. The Western countries should know that, Vucic told Reuters in an interview.

That is the danger ... when national sentiments are stoked.

In response to Serbias bid to prevent Kosovos membership in international organizations, Pristina imposed 100 percent tariffs on goods imported from Serbia, something that could cost the Serbian economy 600 million euros in one year, around 0.4 percent of GDP.

To restore the dialogue, Serbia wants those taxes abolished, a move supported by the EU and the United States.

What any settlement could look like is unclear. Both Vucic and Kosovo President Hashim Thaci have floated ideas about a correction of borders or delimitation - terms interpreted by analysts as land swaps.

The West sees the integration of the entire region into the EU and NATO as a way to maintain regional stability.

Our accession to the European Union depends on the dialogue with Pristina and whether one day we will manage to reach a deal, Vucic said, adding that he expected Germany, France or the EU to become more active in the negotiating process.

I think we will see some of their initiatives in the near future, he said, without elaborating.

Vucic, in power since 2012, said he had no plan to resign or call early elections, something demanded by thousands in opposition protests that started last December accusing his government of cronyism, corruption and stifling media freedoms, something he denies.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-kosovo-vucic/delays-in-kosovo-talks-could-destabilize-balkans-serbias-president-says-idUSKCN1R21FI>

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