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## KOSOVO PARLIAMENT DEBATES MASS EXODUS OF YOUNG

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12.04.2019

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Balkan Insight (11 April 2019)

The Kosovo parliament met on Thursday to hold a special session on the exodus of young people, which deputies warned was having a highly damaging effect on the countrys economy and future. The MPs were due to vote a resolution on the subject that night.

Likening the mass exodus to that of 2015, they said young people were forming long queues outside foreign embassies, trying to get visas to leave the impoverished and isolated country.

Two thousand students \* have left Prizren in one year. Not only young people but also whole families are leaving the country, Arber Rexhaj, a deputy from the opposition Vetvendosje party, lamented.

The opposition Social Democratic Party, PSD, blamed the situation in part on bad economic models applied after the independence war of the 1990s.

The gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger and bigger, and it is becoming impossible for the poor to survive here, PSD deputy Visar Ymeri said.

Vetvendosje claimed that the difference between the exodus in 2015 and now is that people were then trying to get into other countries illegally □ but now the mass flight was being done legally through getting work visas.

Towards the end of 2014, with a peak in early 2015, thousands of Kosovo Albanians migrated to EU countries via Hungary, intending to seek asylum. Hardly any got it.

A 2016 report by the German Interior Ministry listed Kosovo and Albania among the three top countries whose citizens requested asylum over 2015.

Kosovars made up the second largest group seeking asylum in Germany that year, filing 37,095 requests. Only Albanians filed more, with a total of 54,762 applications.

At Thursdays extraordinary session, deputies said that not only unemployed people but also people in work in both the public and private sectors were leaving, to get a better education and a better life for their families.

Eurostat information on migration from 2007 to 2018 shows that Kosovo now has 15.4 per cent fewer people, which is far higher than other countries in the region, Rexhaj, from Vetvendosje, said.

Fidan Rekaliu, from the Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK, proposed passing a resolution on the

protection and advancement of young people in Kosovo.

Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj faced criticism for not being present in the session but later said in the press conference that his presence had been impossible due to other engagements.

He said the topic was sensitive and deserved to be discussed, promising that every recommendation of parliament would be taken into consideration.

It is worrying, Haradinaj said, when asked about the images of people waiting in long lines in front of embassies every day.

It is not good that this is happening, but at least they are finding a job in Germany or other countries. They are happy and their families are happy, he added. He said it was hard to stop people moving in a free labour market and a liberal economy.

Kosovo has long suffered very high unemployment and low living standards. It is also relatively isolated as a result of its dispute with Serbia over its status. Its citizens still need visas to travel into the European Union.

Kosovo met one of the main criteria for gaining visa-free travel with the EU when it approved the long-contested border demarcation agreement with Montenegro in March 2018.

But the country has yet to make sufficient progress in the fight against corruption and organised crime, the EU has said.

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