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## **KOSOVO PRESIDENT SAYS DEAL ON TIES WITH SERBIA POSSIBLE THIS YEAR**

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Euro News (7 June 2019)

Kosovos president said on Friday he was hopeful about reaching a deal with Serbia this year on normalising ties despite a recent increase in tensions and that a planned meeting on July 1 in Paris could prove a turning point.

Serbias President Aleksandar Vucic, speaking at the same event in Slovakia, said he was more pessimistic but that both sides must keep seeking a compromise.

Majority-Albanian Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, almost a decade after NATO air strikes ended Belgrades control of the territory following a brutal counter-insurgency there by Serbian security forces.

But Serbia, whose constitution still sees Kosovo as Serb territory, has been blocking Kosovo from joining international institutions such as Interpol and UNESCO. It also still provides financial aid to ethnic Serbs in Kosovo.

This process (of trying to normalise ties) is now in crisis, which brings opportunity for final agreement, Kosovos President Hashim Thaci told the Globsec conference in the Slovak capital Bratislava.

I believe this agreement can be reached this year.

Last month tensions in the region spiked following Kosovan police operations in a region of the small landlocked country that is mainly populated by Serbs and still pledges allegiance to Belgrade.

Serbia put its troops on full alert but Vucic also told the parliament in Belgrade on May 27 that the country had to accept it had lost control of Kosovo. Serbia must either normalise relations with Kosovo through agreement or maintain a frozen conflict, he said.

On Friday Vucic told the Bratislava conference he aimed to maintain peace in the region.

Im very much pessimistic (about a deal), he said.

We need to find a solution. If the political situation today is that bad it means other people will have to do it in the future. We need to find a solution, it has to be a solution in which both sides make concessions.

Vucic is attempting a balancing act by maintaining both Serbias European Union aspirations and close ties with Russia and China. Kosovos independence is not recognised by five EU member

states, by Russia or China.

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/07/kosovo-president-says-deal-on-ties-with-serbia-possible-this-year>

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