
SERBIA PRESIDENT '99% SURE' KOSOVO TALKS WILL BE DROPPED

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Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said Thursday he was "99 percent" sure a Paris summit aimed at reviving talks with Kosovo would be cancelled, as the former war foes remain stuck in an acrimonious diplomatic deadlock, AFP reported.

Belgrade and Pristina leaders were expected to meet in Paris in early July in an effort to reboot the dialogue aimed at normalising relations.

Twenty years after they were divided by war, the Balkan neighbours still have a tense relationship as Belgrade refuses to recognise the independence that Kosovo, a former province, unilaterally declared in 2008.

"I can say with 99 percent certainty that the Paris (meeting) will not take place," Vucic was quoted as saying by Beta news agency.

He said he expected the summit to be cancelled after Kosovo signalled that "Europeans are not the ones who should solve the Kosovo problem."

In recent weeks Pristina leaders have been insisting on the need for involvement from the United States, their top ally, in a dialogue that so far has been mediated by Brussels.

One major roadblock to restarting negotiations has been a 100 percent tariff on Serbian exports that Pristina levied in late 2018.

Vucic refuses to talk until Kosovo lifts the tax, while Pristina says it won't lift the measure until Belgrade shows a willingness to recognise independence.

On Monday, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said he hoped the Paris summit would be "different" than the last meeting in April organised by France and Germany in Berlin.

That summit "did not bring anything concrete. There was no coordination with the US," he said.

Serbia lost control of Kosovo after a NATO bombing intervention forced its troops to withdraw from a war with ethnic Albanian separatists in 1999.

The conflict claimed 13,000 lives, mainly ethnic Albanian Kosovars.

A decade later Kosovo declared independence, in a move recognised by the US and most of Western Europe.

But Belgrade and its allies Moscow and Beijing have never accepted its statehood, effectively shutting Kosovo out of the United Nations.

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