

Still No Deal Between Serbia And Kosovo
By RFE/RL
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BRUSSELS -- The latest talks between the prime ministers of Serbia and Kosovo ended late on March 20 in Brussels with no breakthrough after 12 hours of discussions.

EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton chaired the talks which focused on northern Kosovo where ethnic Serbs are seeking greater autonomy.

Ashton was upbeat after the talks.

"It is my personal view that we are very close to a solution on some of the most difficult issues concerning northern Kosovo. I have always said that purpose of this dialogue is to normalize relations," Ashton said. "We stand in the European Union completely committed to support the prime ministers, to support Belgrade and Pristina in moving forward in that direction."

Ashton also said the two sides would meet again on April 2.

Serbia's Prime Minister Ivica Dacic was cautiously optimistic as well.

"I cannot say that we are close or far from this agreement because the way of observing the situation and the point of view is constantly changing and can be altered any moment," Dacic said.

"There are still some differences, first of all with regard the competencies of the community for the Serbian municipalities [in Northern Kosovo] but I must also admit that for the past seven meetings we really managed to deal with some difficult issues, to reach some agreements and we actually dealt and resolved some issues that no one even dare to deal with so far. "

His counterpart from Kosovo, Hasim Thaci, also took a positive tone.

"I can confirm that we have achieved progress in some of the issues that have been addressed. I also cannot confirm that we are very close or far from a solution but we are at least in the right direction," Thaci said.

The two leaders are scheduled to travel to New York on March 21 to update the United Nations Security Council on the situation in the Balkan region.

Progress in the negotiations could potentially open the door to EU accession talks with Serbia.

The European Commission will deliver a report on the progress made between Belgrade and Pristina in April.

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