

RELEASE IN FULL

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PRISTINA (Reuters) - European Union-mediated talks between Belgrade and Pristina will begin only after a new Kosovo government takes power following elections in February, Kosovo's acting president said. Last month Serbia, which does not recognize Kosovo's independence, agreed to hold talks with Pristina after it was told its hardline stance on its former province could halt progress to the EU. In an interview, acting President Jakup Krasniqi said it would be difficult to start talks during a political crisis that followed President Fatmir Sejdiu's resignation last month. "The first half of February is the optimal time to hold early elections," he told Reuters. "The end of March is the period when Kosovo will have its own institutions and then it can have talks with Serbia." Krasniqi said he will announce the date of early elections a day or two after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits Pristina. Kosovo had scheduled elections for November 2011, but Sejdiu's resignation hurt relations between the two main coalition partners: the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). Krasniqi said early elections could postpone the sale of Telekom, which is expected to bring between 300 million - 600 million euros. Whether the government can secure a parliamentary majority for necessary legislation to sell Telekom is uncertain, he said. "This is complicated at this point," he said.

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