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Macedonian Albanians rally for Kosovo's independence

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Some 5,000 Macedonian Albanians rallied in the western town of Tetovo demanding the independence of Kosovo and a swift end to the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina.

The rally was organized by the Macedonian government junior coalition partner, the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH), as well as local student and non-governmental organizations in an apparent attempt to raise the pressure on the international community ahead of a final phase in negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo Albanians, before the December 10 deadline on the Troika report.

The newly-appointed leader of PDSH, Menduh Thaci, whose name was placed on the United States black list for undermining the peace process in Balkans, said the rally was organized in order to show support for Kosovo's Independence, but also as a warning against alleged attempts to divide the internationally-administrated province.

"We're protesting today against any further delays of the Kosovo-related status process," Thaci told the crowd.

The ongoing political dialogue aimed at solving the Kosovo status has been taking its toll on the Macedonian political scene, with both Albanians and Macedonians worried that a possible outbreak of violence in the province might spill over the border to Albanian-dominated regions in western and north-western Macedonia.

The tiny Balkan country has been rather calm following the 2001 Albanian uprising which was halted after the international community practically forced sides to agree on a set of constitutional changes.

The civil war in Macedonia, back in 2001, started just hours after PDSH supporters rallied in the streets of capital Skopje, chanting slogans in support of Macedonian wing of an Albanian rebel group, named National Liberation Army (Ushtria Clirimtare Kombetare - UCK).

Just as in 2001, hardline Albanian politicians in Macedonia warned that possible division of Kosovo would rip apart the fragile unity of Macedonia, with western part drifting along the path of unification with other Albanian-dominated territories. US and other western countries, worried about those claims, pushed Albanian politicians in more moderate waters, but the overall tensions in Macedonia remain rather high ahead of the crucial phase of Kosovo talks.