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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**EU foreign policy chief to host meeting of Western Balkans leaders today (*media*)**

Most media report that the European Union’s foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, will host today in Brussels a meeting of leaders of Western Balkans countries. A press statement issued by Mogherini’s office said the meeting will discuss current developments in the Western Balkans and the outlook for 2018, “a year that will offer the partners in the region a unique opportunity to advance on the European Union integration path”. “The European Union is committed to strengthening the EU engagement with the region and ensuring that all Western Balkans Six take the necessary steps to render their progress towards the European Union irreversible,” the statement said.

**Haradinaj demands Kosovo be treated as “equal” by Brussels (*Zeri/EO*)**

Ahead of his trip to Brussels, Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, said in an interview to ***Ekonomia Online*** news website that he will ask for Kosovo to be treated by the EU as an equal party saying that Brussels links many issues to the dialogue with Serbia. He pointed out that while Serbia has moved forward in its EU integration process, Kosovo has remained only with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). “We are asking for the candidate status for next year and opening of chapters. This request speeds up the visa liberalisation process,” Haradinaj said.

**Hoxhaj: EU will not accept new members with open issues (*Zeri*)**

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj, has come out in support of the statement by the European Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn that the EU will not admit new members that have open bilateral and regional issues. Hoxhaj said the block membership of the Western Balkans to the EU would avoid possible obstructions of countries against one another. In a meeting with Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias in Athens, Hahn said that 2018 will be a crucial year in the accession process of Western Balkans countries.

**Hoxha: We expect EU to reconfirm Kosovo’s European perspective (*Koha*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, hailed the statement of EU commissioner Hahn on the accession perspective of the Western Balkans. Hoxha said Kosovo is ready to fulfill its duties in moving ahead in its European integration path. “We expect the EU to reconfirm European perspective of our country. Commissioner Hahn made it clear that countries that have unresolved issues with neighbours cannot be part of the EU,” Hoxha said.

**Vetevendosje heading toward division? (*media*)**

***Koha Ditore*** reports on its front page that the split between the leaders of the Vetevendosje Movement was evident even at the meeting of the General Council on Sunday. The chairs of the meeting announced internal elections and said that Vetevendosje will have a new leader before the end of February next year. Party leader, Visar Ymeri, MP Dardan Molliqaj, Shqipe Pantina, Dukagjin Gorani and Aida Derguti did not attend the meeting of the General Council. Ymeri wrote in a Facebook post that the meeting was hasty and that it was called at “an exceptionally sensitive time for the organization”. Albin Kurti, former Vetevendosje leader, who is currently in detention, sent a letter which was read at the General Council. Kurti said in his letter that he was disappointed by what he called destructive and hostile approach by certain members of the party. Kurti pardoned Aida Derguti for the insults she made against him and said that every Vetevendosje activist is needed but that no one is irreplaceable. ***Bota Sot*** asks in its leading front-page headline if Kurti’s letter could have saved Vetevendosje from division. ***Epoka e Re*** quotes Hydajet Hyseni, chair of the General Council, as saying that there are disagreements but no splits within Vetevendosje. ***Koha Ditore*** quotes political analyst, Behlul Beqaj, as saying that Vetevendosje could be heading toward division and that “the party cannot hide behind a false unity”.

**AAK candidate wins mayoral elections in Istog (*media*)**

All media report that Gani Dreshaj of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) has won the run-off elections in Istog municipality. According to preliminary results announced by the Central Election Commission, Dreshaj won 50.1 percent of votes, while Haki Rugova of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) won 49.9 percent. CEC chairperson, Valdete Daka, told a press conference in Pristina that the final results will be announced after the counting of conditional ballots, mailed ballots and ballots from disabled persons. Dreshaj said in a Facebook post: “my victory has been reconfirmed and I will not allow for it to be taken away from me. I am now expecting the results of mailed ballots that will make my victory even greater”. ***Koha Ditore*** quotes LDK representatives as saying that they will not accept the results. LDK leader Isa Mustafa is quoted as saying in ***Gazeta Express*** that Rugova leads with 55 votes against Dreshaj. ***Epoka e Re*** reports on its front page that Dreshaj has managed to win in what was once an LDK stronghold.

**Palokaj: The second condition (*Koha*)**

The paper’s Brussels-based correspondent, Augustin Palokaj, writes in an opinion piece that “some EU diplomats claim that Kosovo lacks so far behind in providing results in the fight against corruption and organized crime that even if it meets the condition of ratifying the border demarcation deal with Montenegro it might still not get visa liberalization”. Palokaj also writes that “while for the first condition [the border deal] political readiness would suffice, the second condition requires concrete results from prosecutors, judges and police, and Kosovo does not fare well in this regard and EULEX has not helped. But the EU will not hold EULEX accountable. This is why the second condition could be even more difficult than the first”.

**Wesslau: Spain must recognize Kosovo to keep Catalonia (*media*)**

Fredrik Wesslau, director of the Center for Western Balkans, Russia, Turkey and East Europe, said in an interview to Belgrade-based ***Politika*** that Spain must recognize Kosovo’s independence if it wants to keep Catalonia. “Kosovo and Catalonia are two completely different cases. Spain cannot tell the essential differences between the two cases and it also proves it is not able to distinct legitimate demands for self-determination from separatism. In doing so, Spain signals that maybe even Catalonia could have reasons to ask for independence,” Wesslau said. “There was a war in Kosovo and Pristina has been recognized by over 100 countries, so there is no point in Madrid comparing Kosovo to Catalonia.”

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