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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Arifi: Initiative for abrogating specialist chambers still under review (*Zeri*)**

Avni Arifi, advisor to Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, said the initiative for abrogating law on specialist chambers is still under review. “It is in formal procedure, meaning receiving opinions from three government departments and will go back to the Assembly within 30 days,” Arifi said.

**Limaj: Special Court abrogation more dangerous than its establishment (*RTK*)**

Kosovo Assembly MP and leader of the Initiative for Kosovo (NISMA) said that abrogation of the Special Court would have been a more dangerous process than its establishment. At the meeting of NISMA’s National Council, Limaj said that initiative for abrogation should have an address on who is accountable. Limaj had said that he is against the Special Court, however, he now considers that Kosovo should move forward. “We can never say no to justice… Nisma can neither stop nor abrogate it. We believe the interests of the state cannot be jeopardized over the fates of individuals,” he said.

**Degradation of Kosovo’s diplomacy (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its front page that Kosovo’s Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli has made a recent statement that goes against the engagement of local institutions and international partners for more recognitions for Kosovo. In an interview to Italian news agency ***Fona***¸ Pacolli commented on relations between Kosovo and Serbia. “Serbia must not necessarily recognize Kosovo’s independence, but it should not obstruct Pristina’s path toward Europe,” Pacolli was quoted as saying. “We acknowledge Serbia as a very important factor for peace and stability in the Balkans and we know that Belgrade can contribute greatly to this and therefore it must acknowledge the fact that Kosovo is an independent state”. Pacolli also said that 2018 will be crucial for dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. Kosovo government officials involved in dialogue with Belgrade did not say if Pacolli’s remarks represent their position too. Avni Arifi, principal advisor to Prime Minister Haradinaj and head of the Kosovo delegation in the Brussels talks, told the paper that he is involved in technical dialogue and suggested that on government-related topics it should contact the Office of the Prime Minister. A reply from Haradinaj’s office noted: “We cannot comment on statements made by the Foreign Minister or any other minister without knowing the context … But as far normalization of relations with Serbia is concerned, Kosovo’s position is clear: mutual recognition!”.

**Hoxhaj: Vulin’s announcements could destabilize the country (*RTK*)**

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj, reacted to a statement by Serbia’s Minister of Defense, Aleksandar Vulin, who said the Serbian army is monitoring the situation in the north of Kosovo. Hoxhaj wrote on his Twitter account that such statements are a threat to security in Kosovo and that they could result in destabilization. He added further that situation in northern part is calm and sustainable. “Kosovo Security Force, KFOR and EULEX are responsible for the security in Kosovo,” Hoxhaj wrote.

**Tahiri: Serbia is not ready to investigate war crimes (*Ekonomia e Re/RTK*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Justice, Abelard Tahiri, said Serbia is not ready to cooperate on investigation of war crimes. Despite continuous requests of Kosovo’s prosecutors the response of the Serbian colleagues has always been negative, he added. However, Tahiri said they will insist to receive information which would shed light on the murder of 15 thousand people by Serbian forces, as well as on over 20 thousand raped women and over 1600 missing persons.

**Hoxhaj to Vucic: The only common market for Balkans is EU (*RTK*)**

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj, replied to the statement of the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic, for a joint market, made in Davos, that his idea is creation of a joint market in Balkans. “Thanks, but no thanks! There will never be a new Yugoslavia and the only common market for WB will be in EU,”Hoxhaj wrote on his Twitter account.

**Shala: KSF to be transformed with or without constitutional changes (*Epoka*)**

Haxhi Shala, chairperson of the Kosovo Assembly’s committee on internal affairs, security and oversight of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), said in an interview to the paper that he was hopeful that through lobbying efforts Kosovo institutions and the international community will manage to reach agreement with Kosovo Serb MPs on transformation of the KSF into an armed force through constitutional changes but if this fails, Kosovo will transform KSF’s mandate through a regular law. He said that the issue of KSF transformation is expected to be discussed at the Assembly in May and that he believed that the ruling coalition officials will by then talk to the Serbian List.

**Cuoci: No plans for downsizing NATO troops in Kosovo (*Kosovapress*)**

KFOR Commander, Major General Salvatore Cuoci, said in an interview to ***Kosovapress*** that NATO has no plan to downsize the presence of its peacekeeping troops in Kosovo. If and when this happens, noted Cuoci, it will only be as a result of the assessment that there is improvement on the ground. In the meantime, “KFOR continues to perform its duties, continues to control the administrative boundary line, continues to guarantee a safe and secure environment for all.” COMKFOR said the overall situation in Kosovo is stable and peaceful despite the recent events in the north. “We are trying with all force to make sure this episode, that happened recently, will not have an impact or affect the overall security situation. We, along with all institutions and particularly the international community, are trying to maintain a calm situation and I have to say that although the recent event was something deeply emotion that in a way affected the security in Kosovo, we are trying to keep a peaceful situation,” MG Cuoci said. He also spoke about the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) transformation saying it should be carried out through constitutional changes.

**Hoxha: Kosovo to apply for CoE membership this year (*RTK*)**

Kosovo’s Minister for European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, said Kosovo will apply for Council of Europe membership this year and that the ministry she leads is committed in implementing all criteria required for this process. Analysts meanwhile consider that Kosovo’s membership to CoE will not be an easy undertaking. Avni Mazreku said there are a number of countries, part of the Council of Europe, that have not recognised independence of Kosovo while Gazmend Qorraj said that while the plant to gain membership in CoE is a good move, it needs to be planned well ahead and be inclusive.

**Delawie urges prosecutors to fight corruption (*RTK*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie, called on Kosovo prosecutors to pursue a zero-tolerance policy in treating corruption cases. “The people of Kosovo do not believe that rule of law institutions are working seriously in fighting corruption. You need to work decisively and change this because, at the end of the day, you lead this battle and the eyes of the Kosovo people are on you,” Delawie said. He noted that corruption prevents development of democracy and economy and increases social inequality. He also said the investigation of Oliver Ivanovic’s murder should be conducted professionally. “Unfortunately, the prosecution in the north is being challenged with pressure coming from high-profile cases and that tragic case of Oliver Ivanovic’s killing. I think it is crucial for this case to be worked on with utmost professionalism despite the challenge,” Delawie said in his remarks at the annual prosecutors’ conference.

**Kosovo’s membership of intl organizations becoming more difficult (*Koha*)**

The paper quotes political analysts in Pristina as saying that Kosovo’s membership of international organizations is going to become even more difficult if Kosovo’s relations with EU partners and the United States of America are jeopardized. The paper notes that these relations are threatened by two issues, Kosovo’s failure to ratify the border demarcation deal with Montenegro and the initiative to revoke the special court. Arian Zeka, executive director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, told the paper that EU partners and the U.S. helped Kosovo become independent and join many international mechanisms. “The eventual damaging of these relations would impede Kosovo’s efforts to join other institutions and we would no longer be able to count on the support of these countries,” Zeka said.

**Pristina leads list of most polluted world cities (*media*)**

Media report that Pristina is now leading the list of world cities with the highest level of air pollution. ***Koha Ditore*** reports on its front page that measurements in several parts of the city show that air pollution has reached hazardous levels to human health. Local institutions meanwhile are not making any concrete steps to remedy the situation. Pristina Mayor, Shpend Ahmeti, met on Sunday that Minister for Environment and Spatial Planning, Albena Reshitaj, and agreed to launch an awareness campaign for air pollution, to build a major ring-road that would ease traffic congestion and to expand the co-generation project. Most media are also reporting that a protest will be held on Wednesday in front of the National Theatre in Pristina “against the negligence of local institutions on the matter”.

**No move toward unblocking Mitrovica main bridge (*Koha*)**

Although many dates have been mentioned for revitalizing the Mitrovica main bridge, the situation remains the same since April last year when construction on the bridge was suspended. The construction was stopped by Mitrovica North Mayor Goran Rakic citing a number of incidents in Mitrovica North. ***KTV*** tried to contact Rakic to find out the reason why the works have not resumed yet and whether the project will be changed, ​​but received no reply.

**Offensive graffiti against Serbs in Uglar village (*Klan Kosova*)**

***Klan Kosova*** reports that offensive graffiti against Serbs have been reported by residents of the village of Uglar, Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje municipality who also said the windows of the village school were broken. School principal, Goran Jovic, told ***TV Most*** that the graffiti are intended to intimidate the Serb community. Meanwhile, Marko Djuric, head of the Serbian Government’s Office for Kosovo, condemned the incident saying Serbia will not remain idle in face of any outbreak of violence in Kosovo. “I warn those who wish to destabilize our province to think well of the consequences,” Djuric said.

**Initiative for Kosovo changes its name (*RTK*)**

Fatmir Limaj’s political party will not be called anymore the Initiative for Kosovo but the Social-Democratic Initiative. This decision was reached at the meeting of the party’s National Council, held on Sunday, where they discussed demarcation of the border with Montengro, Special Court and other significant issues for Kosovo. This political party is currently part of the coalition government, holding a position of Deputy Prime Minister, and has three ministries.

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