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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Ruling parties struggling to secure votes to pass border bill (*Zeri/Koha*)**

***Zeri*** reports on the front page that the ruling coalition in Kosovo does not have enough votes to ratify the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro as its partner, Serbian List, is conditioning its vote in exchange for establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities. MP Igor Simic said the Serbian List’s priority at present is not the border demarcation issue but the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities. Meanwhile, the opposition Vetevendosje has also announced it will continue to oppose the agreement, leaving the coalition parties with no more than 77 out of the 80 votes required to ratify agreement with Montenegro. ***Koha Ditore*** reports on its front page that the ruling coalition lacks at least two votes to ratify the border demarcation deal with Montenegro. Citing unnamed sources, the paper also reports that the ruling coalition is fishing for the needed votes among the separate faction of Vetevendosje MPs.

**Government of Kosovo to convene meetings on demarcation today (*Bota Sot*)**

The paper reports that the government of Kosovo will hold two consecutive meetings today on the issue of border demarcation agreement with Montenegro. In the first one, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is expected to withdraw the draft bill on border demarcation submitted to the Assembly weeks ago and in the second meeting later in the day a supplemented copy that includes the recent joint statement between Kosovo and Montenegro presidents will be passed to the Assembly.

**PM Haradinaj’s statement on demarcation with Montenegro (*media*)**

Most online media cover Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj’s statement to the media on border demarcation with Montenegro. Below is the full statement: “Scheduling the [assembly] session on Sunday came as a result of the great and good will after the agreement was reached, but the issue of demarcation has been going on for years and it requires consultations among all parliamentary groups and with all MPs, so that we can have a well-prepared [assembly] session. There have been changes to the actual situation. There is an agreement between the two Presidents that mentions the option of reviewing and correcting the situation as far as Cakorr and Kulla are concerned. Despite doubts, the agreement is a good matter between the two presidents. As Prime Minister, I have worked on this agreement all the time, on its core and I thank everyone that has been involved. The agreement and the law on ratification that I will submit to the Assembly must be a single document and should be voted together. We will follow all procedures and preparations on the matter. We have lost almost three years on this issue and maybe it will take us another week, but we must be prepared and careful in preparing the session because there is no going back. We are in the process of resolving the demarcation. History will show that we have won the territorial right of the country and freedom of movement and that we have taken Kosovo out from a very grave position. We could not have done this alone, without the understanding of many others and now it is important to have the understanding of all, the Serbian List, Vetevendosje and every MP, because this is a moment when all of us must be united”.

**Thaci seeks U.S. support for demarcation, dialogue and army (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, met on Monday with U.S. Senator Ron Johnson, whom he thanked for the messages and congratulations on the 10th anniversary of the independence. “We are grateful for the continued support of the USA, which has been determining for Kosovo’s freedom and independence. The messages and congratulations of President Trump are encouraging, to work even harder,” Thaci said. He informed Senator Johnson about the established consensus regarding the ratification of the agreement on the marking of the border line with Montenegro, about the process of normalizing relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and about the necessity of transforming the KSF into the Kosovo Army. The President has requested for US support on these topics, for these processes to be successful. Senator Johnson offered full support in all areas for Kosovo. Thaci also said that the U.S. is the most important partner of Kosovo and the biggest friend of the people of Kosovo.

**Delawie expects ratification of demarcation this week (*RTK*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie, stated that ratification of the Agreement for demarcation of the border between Kosovo and Montenegro, will mark the start of the second decade of Kosovo’s progress. “What an incredible weekend. Kosovo10 celebrations might be ending today, but we look forward to the next decade's progress starting this week with ratification of the Agreement on border demarcation,” Delawie wrote on his Twitter account.

**U.S. don’t support exchange of territories, call for creative solutions (*Kosova Sot*)**

The United States Embassy in Pristina said today that they do not support ideas for the exchange of territories between Kosovo and Serbia. “We don’t support the exchange of territories or setting precedents that would cause more problems than solutions. All sides must be creative in finding a solution,” the U.S. Embassy told ***Radio Free Europe***. “The United States continue to strongly support the EU-brokered dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and encourage both sides to speed up their efforts for the normalization of relations … The U.S. support both sides in reaching a comprehensive agreement as the only way to unblock the future of Kosovo and Serbia toward the West”.

**Haradinaj: Timeframe for dialogue with Serbia, mutual recognition (*Koha*)**

Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said on Monday that there needs to be a timeframe for dialogue with Serbia and that the process should end with mutual recognition. Haradinaj made these remarks after meeting U.S. Senator Ron Johnson who is visiting Kosovo on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of independence. Haradinaj also said that “Kosovo and its people will be forever grateful for the help that the United States and the American people gave in all periods”. Haradinaj also said that Kosovo is a model of good neighborly relations and that it is committed to dialogue with all neighboring countries, including Serbia.

**Technical dialogue with new dynamics and approach (*Epoka*)**

Head of the Kosovo delegation for technical dialogue with Serbia, Avni Arifi, told the paper that the next meetings in Brussels are scheduled for 26 and 27 February. He said that the process will be comprehensive and transparent, and added that issues to be discussed do not belong only to the governing coalition. According to him, the technical dialogue process will resume with new dynamics and different aim and focus. He denied any possibility of discussions for exchange of the territories. According to Arifi, Kosovo has nothing to share or exchange with anyone.

**Arifi indicates new draft on Association/Community (*Zeri*)**

Head of the Kosovo delegation in talks with Serbia, Avni Arifi, said their position on the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities is clear in that its establishment needs to be in line with the Constitutional Court’s ruling and that to this end, a new draft agreement should be put together.

**Vucic: Serbia to propose a solution by beginning of April (*RTK*)**

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, has set a deadline for the proposal of a solution for Kosovo. He said that this will happen by the end of March, the latest, beginning of April. “It should be a compromise. If we do not speak about this, we will have a frozen conflict,” Vucic said. He said that Albanians want a greater Albania, however he added, this does not contribute to the stability of the region. “Serbia does not want a greater Serbia, but we want to safeguard Serbs’ identity. We need them to be safe,” Vucic said. Speaking about the statement of the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, for a joint President of Kosovo and Serbia, Vucic said he expects a more powerful reaction of the international community.

**Rama’s idea for a single Kosovo-Albania president encounters opposition (*Zeri*)**

In his speech before the Kosovo Assembly, Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama came out with a proposal for Kosovo and Albania to have a single president in the future. This idea however has encountered opposition in Pristina although the government of Kosovo has refused to comment on it, the paper reports. MP Mimoza Kusari-Lila from Alternativa said Kosovo and Albania have many more problems that they need to address before raising such issues. “I hope Kosovo and Albania will have a joint EU president as soon as possible,” Kusari-Lila said. Avdullah Hoti from the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) has also opposed the idea saying it shows lack of respect for aspirations of Kosovars. At the same time, the European Commission has slammed Rama’s statement as being “unhelpful”. “Statements that can be interpreted as political interference in neighbouring countries are not helpful in building good neighbourly relations,” spokesperson Catherine Ray said. She added that the EU expects the building of constructive and cooperative relations to continue in the region.

**Engel: U.S. and Kosovo, strong relations regardless of who is in power (*Koha*)**

In a front-page interview to the paper, U.S. Congressman Elliot Engel says that the United States of America and Kosovo will maintain strong relations “regardless of who is in power”. Engel said that on the 10th anniversary of independence, Kosovo needs to reflect more on the achievements than the problems. Engel said Kosovo’s leaders, President Thaci and Prime Minister Haradinaj, realize that they must ratify the border demarcation deal with Montenegro and not obstruct the functioning of the special court. “Sometimes in life we end up doing things that we don’t like. But after we take a few steps backwards and look at the situation we understand that it is the only choice. I think that the Prime Minister and the President, Haradinaj and Thaci, understand this,” Engel was quoted as saying. Asked to comment on recent ideas for Kosovo’s division, Engel said: “the problem with any kind of division is if demands for border changes in the Balkans will not stop. This is the issue. I am certain that people in the Republika Srpska would want to be part of Belgrade. I am certain that there are also others that want border changes. Once this begins there is no end to it. I think that there is a number of problems that needs to be addressed. I always thought that division is a right, because people must decide. But I don’t think it is the right thing, because one you open that door there is no end to it.”

**Karem: KSF transformation in coordination with U.S. (*Epoka*)**

The U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Robert S. Karem, met on Monday with Kosovo’s Minister of Security Force, Rrustem Berisha and commander of this Force, Rrahman Rama, to discuss transformation of Kosovo Security Force into Kosovo’s Armed Force. Karem assessed that transformation process should be constitutional and with coordinated steps with the United States and other strategic partners. He also spoke about the major focus of the United States on the developments in security field in Balkans and wider.

**Vetevendosje calls for international investigation into Assembly attack (*dailies*)**

In a press conference yesterday, Vetevendosje officials have urged the implementation of the Kosovo Assembly resolution adopted recently calling for an international investigation into the 2016 grenade attack on the Assembly building for which the court has already convicted four Vetevendosje activists. MPs Arberie Nagavci and Liburn Aliu said the court’s ruling is arbitrary and does not rest on any evidence.

**Serb KSF members in Zubin Potok receive threats (*Kallxo/Koha*)**

The Kosovo Police said they were investigating a leaflet signed by an unknown group calling itself Severna Armija (Northern Army) threatening Serb members of the Kosovo Security Force to quit or “have bones crushed.” The leaflet found in the municipality of Zubin Potok also contains the names of seven Serb residents claimed to be part of KSF. “We will meet soon. No municipality or police can protect you,” the leaflet reads.

**Former UNMIK chief explains why the north was divided (*media*)**

Former UNMIK chief, Bernard Kouchner, told ***Klan Kosova*** in an interview on Monday that the northern part of Kosovo was divided from the beginning because no one wanted another war. “The northern part of Kosovo was divided in the very beginning because we did not want a military action that would result in war again,” Kouchner said. “It was a zone within the geography of Kosovo even though we could go to the three zones in the north. I did not come here to make war. One of the successes of the United Nations was not to have war”. Kouchner recalled the period he came to Kosovo and said he was most touched by the massacres against villagers. “I still feel like crying when I remember that period. The massacres of villagers was a painful reality … I also went to the houses of Serbs in Pristina together with Mr. Thaci and I saw women that were assaulted and raped,” he said.

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