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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Mitchell: US has no new plan on Kosovo (*dailies*)**

In his first visit to Kosovo in the new capacity, the US Assistant Secretary of State Wess Mitchell reconfirmed his country’s support for Kosovo. At a joint press briefing with President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, Mitchell dismissed reports in Serbian media saying that he would present a new plan on Kosovo. Mitchell called such reports “speculation”. “I did not come here to unveil any specific plan but I am here to talk about the future of Kosovo and Serbia, the dialogue and the European perspective of the Western Balkans countries,” Mitchell noted. He said it was very important for him to begin the Western Balkans tour with Kosovo noting that the alliance between Kosovo and the US will continue to grow. He said Kosovo has made ‘phenomenal’ progress in the period since declaring independence and stressed the importance of commitment to dialogue with Serbia and ratification of the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro. Assistant Secretary Mitchell also spoke about the Kosovo Security Force transformation stressing that the US support creation of a Kosovo army. Asked to comment on reports of growing Russian influence in the Balkans, Mitchell confirmed reports saying it undermines democratic institutions. “We have also been clear in our discussions with Russian representatives that this interference is not in their interest or in that of the Balkans people,” he underlined.

Meanwhile, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci said the US was and remains Kosovo’s strategic partner and thanked the US administration for its focus on Kosovo and the Western Balkans. Thaci thanked Mitchell for choosing Kosovo as the first stop of his visit to the Western Balkans and said he informed him of Kosovo’s efforts to consolidate its statehood both internally and externally and to finalise the border demarcation with Montenegro as soon as possible as the final step towards the visa liberalisation regime. Thaci said the issue would be concluded in the coming days. “No one has any more reasons to delay the ratification of the agreement,” he underlined. He also said that he discussed the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into a Kosovo army as being a precondition for Kosovo joining NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme and eventually the Alliance itself. On the dialogue for normalisation of relations with Serbia, Thaci said the final outcome needs to respect mutual sovereignty. He also said the options such as partition of Kosovo or exchange of territories will be unacceptable.

Yesterday, the US Assistant Secretary of State Wess Mitchell also met Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj. A statement issued by the government of Kosovo following the meeting states that the two discussed political developments in Kosovo and the US support in Kosovo’s consolidation. “The support the US has and continues to provide to Kosovo in all state-building processes and now in its Euro-Atlantic journey is vital for the Republic of Kosovo,” the government said.

**Analysts: Mitchell’s visit, boost for demarcation, dialogue, and army (*Zeri*)**

The visit of the US Assistant Secretary of State, Wess Mitchell, to Kosovo is seen by political analysts as being a boost for processes like border demarcation with Montenegro, dialogue for normalisation of relations with Serbia, and creation of a Kosovo army. Journalist Adriatik Kelmendi said the visit is a reconfirmation of the interest of Trump administration towards the Balkans. “We know what the position of the US administration is that Kosovo is independent and sovereign and this was made clear continuously to the Government in Belgrade,” Kelmendi said. International law professor, Afrim Hoti, said Mitchell’s visit is particularly important in light of, as he said, important developments in the coming months. “As in the past crucial role it played, [Mitchell’s] visit now is support for conclusion of dialogue,” Hoti said. Meanwhile, analyst Haki Abazi said the US has no new plan on Kosovo and that Mitchell’s visit to the Balkans is also related to the growing tensions in the region and Russia’s attempts to extend its influence.

**Veseli: Border demarcation to be ratified this week (*RTK*)**

Kosovo Assembly President, Kadri Veseli, said this week will be decisive for the issue of border demarcation with Montenegro. “Citizens deserve for this issue to be definitely resolved. We are working intensively and I can say that this drama will have its epilogue this week,” Veseli said adding that there is consensus on the matter but that “little more support” is still required to ratify the border demarcation agreement.

**EU: Kosovo justice system failed in fighting high-level corruption (*Koha*)**

Kosovo’s judicial system is not focused on fighting high-level corruption and organised crime, says a report drafted by three authors commissioned by the European Union. The report, which the paper says it has a copy of, has been presented to Kosovo justice institutions and the Ministry of European Integration and is classified as internal and restricted to the public. The report is said to have focused on the lack of harmonization of Kosovo legislation with that of the EU, challenges in investigative and judicial procedures, lack of professionalism of judges and prosecutors, as well as lack of independence. It notes that Kosovo authorities were not in a position to name any specific strategy dealing with recuperation of assets, thus ignoring the fact that confiscation of illegally-obtained assets is crucial to fighting corruption, organised crime, terrorism, and human trafficking.

**Slovenian FM to visit Kosovo today (*Telegrafi*)**

Slovenia’s Foreign Minister, Karl Erjavec, is going to visit Kosovo today. In his visit, Erjavec will meet Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli. Erjavec is also expected to take part in the Kosovo-Slovenia economic forum along with representatives of forty Slovenian companies.

**President Thaci travelled to the United Kingdom (*Epoka*)**

The President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, travelled on Monday to Great Britain to meet senior state officials there. He is expected to meet with state secretary for Foreign Affairs, Boris Johnson. He will also participate at the promotion of the book “New State, Modern Statesman: Hashim Thaci – A Biography” by authors Roger Boyes and Suzy Jagger. Other representatives of the political and public life Great Britain are expected to participate at the promotion.

**Trepca mine manager resigns citing political interference (*dailies*)**

Ahmet Tmava, general manager of the Trepca mining complex, has resigned his post citing political interference coming from the Minister of Economic Development, Valdrin Lluka. Lluka meanwhile rejected allegations as groundless. He said Tmava cannot resign his post as his contract expired on 5 February anyway. “He had no mandate and as such he shouldn’t have been in Trepca’s premises in the first place,” Lluka said. The Ministry of Economic Development in a statement said it had received a letter from Tmava asking for access to Trepca’s bank account, which was denied to him on the grounds of his contract having expired.

**80 percent of domestic violence strategy has not been implemented (*Koha*)**

Kosovo Women’s Network presented a report on institutional response towards gender-based violence in Kosovo and found that more than 80 percent of the strategy on domestic violence has not been implemented by respective institutions. Head of the Kosovo Women’s Network, Igballe Rogova, said despite progress, legal framework on fighting gender-based violence is not being implemented.

Read the report: <http://www.womensnetwork.org/documents/20180312142859762.pdf>

**“Government should be careful with expenditures of state reserves” (*Epoka*)**

Principal Deputy Leader of the Committee for Budget and Finances, MP from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Safete Hadergjonaj, appealed to the government to be careful with spending state reserves. She said the Assembly of Kosovo has not received so far any report from the government on the flow of budgetary expenditures during these months. She said that expenditures exceed the foreseen dynamics of expenditures, then the Assembly will give recommendations which are obligatory for the government.

**“Massacre of state reserves, Hamza undertakes measures” (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Finance, Bedri Hamza, said he will not support ministries’ budgetary requests that were not foreseen or planned during the legal terms. The paper notes that the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, is not being at all “merciful” with budgetary reserves of Kosovo. Only during the latest meeting, the governing cabinet decided to allocate half a million Euros for the activities which mark 550 anniversary of the historic figure, Gjerg Kastrioti – Skenderbeu. During three months, the government has spent two million Euros, from the four million and eight hundred thousand Euros, foreseen to be state reserves for this year. These expenditures forced Hamza appeal on Friday to the Ministers to plan their budgets in time. “We should be careful with future requests because reserves are reaching the end,” Hamza said.

**Education minister accused of interfering in accreditation agency (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on the front page that Kosovo’s Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Shyqyri Bytyqi, has attempted to interfere with a decision of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency to penalize a private college owned by a person from Malisheva which is where the leader of the Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) Fatmir Limaj comes from. The paper says Bytyqi, also part of NISMA, wrote a letter to the accreditation agency asking it to reconsider its decision for suspending four programmes of the private college, ISPE, and while Bytyqi denied sending such a request, the paper claims to be in possession of the request.

**Apostolova: Low results on education, result of politics (*Zeri*)**

Head of the EU Office for Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, expressed disappointment with regards to the political interferences on the education system. According to her, these interferences made Kosovo show poor results in this field. “There should be no political interferences, teachers should be qualified. With the current situation, students cannot know how to read and write as it resulted in PISA test, it is painful but true,” Apostolova said during the publication of the report “Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo.”

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