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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**President Thaci initiates actions for establishing Association/Community (*Koha*)**

The paper quotes on its front page Bekim Collaku, political advisor to Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, as saying that concrete actions on the formation of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities will begin today and will not stop until the full implementation of the agreement. President Thaci said recently in Brussels that Kosovo will meet its part of the obligations on the Association by setting up a managing team that will work on the statute of the Association. “The President said the managing team will become functional and that international experts will join this team to help in drafting the statute,” Collaku said. Meanwhile opposition representatives and political analysts argue that Thaci is trying to score political points through the Association. Serbs on the other hand insist that the only roadmap for the Association/Community should be the Brussels agreements, and not the verdict of the Constitutional Court which found violations in seven chapters of the agreement on the Association/Community.

**Government wants broad-based consensus on Association/Community (*Express*)**

The Kosovo government believes that the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities is not a priority and that there are more pressing issues that need to be tackled, the Pristina-based news website reports. Prime Minister Haradinaj said last week that he is not working on the Association/Community as the issue is not on his agenda. Avni Arifi, head of the Kosovo delegation in technical talks with Belgrade, denied rumors that Haradinaj is not addressing the Association/Community as a sign of revenge on the Serbian List for not voting on the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro. “It has nothing to do with the Serbian List … The Association is a special issue and it is not related to other issues. The reason why the Association has not been discussed yet is that there have been many important priorities to be addressed. We have good relations with the Serbian List. Negotiations on the formation of the Association should start with a greater consensus”.

**Hoxhaj: Assembly to adopt a platform on dialogue (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, said on Sunday that Kosovo should draft a platform for talks with Serbia and that this platform needs to be adopted in the Assembly. “The platform should include all of Kosovo’s objectives and expectations from dialogue with Serbia. The platform should also contain all the elements of a final agreement and the list of all political topics and issues,” he added.

**Vetevendosje doesn’t want Thaci to lead talks with Serbia (*media*)**

The Vetevendosje Movement does not want President Thaci to lead talks with Serbia, the paper reports on page three. Vetevendosje MP Xhelal Svecla told a press conference on Sunday that Thaci must withdraw from negotiations with Serbia. “He is in a rush for dialogue with Serbia because of three reasons. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Wess Mitchell, said Kosovo must have its army. Vucic wants to have an agreement with Thaci before Kosovo forms its army. The fate of Thaci’s political career is not known therefore Vucic wants to take advantage of Thaci’s weakness and score greater benefits for Serbia from the new dialogue,” Svecla is quoted as saying in ***Zeri***. ***Epoka e Re*** quotes Svecla as saying that the Assembly should have the lead role in the process of talks with Belgrade.

**Avramopoulos to visit Kosovo soon (*Zeri*)**

The European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, will visit Kosovo soon, the paper reports on page two. Avramopoulos is expected to call on Kosovo’s authorities to provide concrete results in the fight against organized crime and corruption so that EU institutions can make a decision on visa liberalization in the coming months. Following the ratification of the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro, Avramopoulos said he would be the happiest man if he were to sign the decision on visa liberalization for Kosovo.

**Hoxha: We are optimistic visa will be removed this year (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, said she was certain that Kosovo’s citizens will travel visa-free in the Schengen zone in 2018. “We are optimistic that Kosovo citizens will move freely without visas within 2018,” Hoxha said in an interview to Pristina-based ***TV21***.

**“EU shouldn’t use corruption in Kosovo to keep citizens isolated” (*Koha*)**

The paper’s Brussels-based correspondent Augustin Palokaj writes in an opinion piece that “after the ratification of the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro – which shouldn’t have been a visa liberalization criteria at all – it became clear that it was not the only or final condition for visa liberalization. Another condition is for Kosovo to have a register of evidences in the fight against organized crime and corruption. If the EU (or member states) want they can find evidence that this condition has not been met. But in doing so they would punish Kosovo’s citizens twice. First, they [Kosovo’s citizens] are punished by the very existence of the high-level of crime and corruption in structures in Kosovo. Second, delays in the visa liberalization process will harm the ordinary citizens and not those involved in negative phenomena. The latter, be they politicians or criminals, or both politicians and criminals, have no problems with travelling or with getting visas”.

**Pacolli calls on Greece to recognize Kosovo’s independence (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Behgjet Pacolli, called on Greece to recognize Kosovo’s independence. On the occasion of Greek independence, Pacolli said: “I call on the institutions of this country to reflect and recognize the Republic of Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state. Greece has no reason not to recognize Kosovo,” he said.

**Serbian Minister not granted permission to visit Kosovo (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not granted permission to Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin to visit Kosovo today. A senior political advisor to the Foreign Minister told the paper that Vulin should first distance himself from criminals that committed war crimes in Kosovo. “Visit requests by the Serbian ministers of interior affairs and defense will be rejected. They need to distance themselves from criminals that have committed war crimes and not give them awards,” the political advisor said.

**Azem Syla put under house arrest (*Kallxo*)**

The Pristina-based news website reports that Azem Syla, former commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army, has been put under house arrest several weeks after he was released custody. Unnamed sources told ***Kallxo*** that the Court of Appeals has changed the security measure. The news website recalls that Syla was released from custody on March 12 after the EU rule-of-law mission (EULEX) transferred the case to local institutions. Kosovo’s special prosecution, in October 2016, filed two indictments for organized crime and money laundering against 22 and 17 persons respectively that it said Syla had led. The groups are alleged to have illegally appropriated land near the Kosovo capital, Pristina, by falsifying the ownership documents and by obtaining unlawful court decisions.

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