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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Kosovo’s leaders call for unity to conclude dialogue with Serbia (*media*)**

All media cover the conference “Scenarios of the ‘Great Finals’ between Kosovo and Serbia” held on Thursday in Pristina. ***Epoka e Re*** reports on its front page that President Hashim Thaci and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj called for political unity to conclude dialogue with Serbia and that a final agreement must include mutual recognitions between the two countries. ***Koha Ditore*** covers the conference under the headline ***Kosovo excludes status quo and exchange of territories***. President Thaci is quoted as saying in ***Lajmi*** that Kosovo’s leadership has always been ready for political solution with Serbia but that the latter does not want to end disagreements. Thaci said twenty years have passed from the liberation war, nineteen from the Rambouillet Peace Conference and ten from the declaration of independence of Kosovo, seven from the start of the discussions in Brussels, while relations between Kosovo and Serbia are still not concluded politically. “In all the international processes which aimed solution of Kosovo’s case, Kosovo leadership has been ready for political agreement with Serbia. Tens of years have were wasted in the past, not because of our fault or responsibility, many good chances, due to the lack of political will of the Serbian leadership to conclude political and historical hostility between Kosovo and Serbia, which are older than one century,” Thaci said. He said that even during the difficult years of war, and those of peace and democracy building in Kosovo, “we have been ready for the great historic agreement with Serbia”. “The conclusion of political dialogue with Serbia through a legally binding agreement, is in Kosovo’s national interest, which does not recognize division lines between government and opposition. We have to be united in this process in order to close this difficult, tragic and historic chapter, and in order to open way to Kosovo to be an equal state with all the other states in UN, EU and NATO Alliance, everywhere,” Thaci said. ***Zeri*** quotes on the front page the U.S. Ambassador in Kosovo, Greg Delawie, as saying that dialogue will conclude this year. Delawie also said dialogue with Serbia has brought great benefits to Kosovo, “such as the integration of the judiciary in the north and the integration of the police”. “There is no alternative to dialogue. The United States of America support Kosovo and Serbia’s aspirations to join the European Union. This year there needs to be progress in dialogue,” Delawie said. Several media note that Prime Minister Haradinaj criticized Brussels for their position vis-à-vis Kosovo, saying that if the European Union lacks the capacity to help Kosovo, “then they should seek help”. “If you don’t want to ask for help, then let us know and we will go our own way, and just as in the past we will do our work. Brussels allows many illegal acts to happen in the northern part of Kosovo but at the same time they have no power to tell Belgrade ‘you have no right to do such a thing,” Haradinaj was quoted as saying.

**Serbian List doesn’t want Association according to Constitution (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its front page that faced with pressure to move forward in the Brussels dialogue, Kosovo has made the next step towards forming the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities. The Kosovo government said on Thursday that Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and President Hashim Thaci have reactivated the managerial team that will draft the statute of the Association in line with the ruling of the Constitutional Court, the Constitution of Kosovo and the applicable legislation. A press release issued by Haradinaj’s office noted: “The statute will be drafted in a transparent and comprehensive process, and it will be comprised by three working mechanisms; managerial team, implementation committee and national constructive group, who will guarantee involvement of the entire political specter, civil society and other relevant mechanisms of the society. International mechanisms which helped Kosovo during all phases will be involved in the process. The final draft of the statute will be sent to the Constitutional Court in order to ensure that it is in compliance with the Constitution of Kosovo. With this step, Kosovo also fulfills the international obligation proving its commitment in the Euro-Atlantic road”. The decision however was not welcomed by the Serbian List which doesn’t want the Association/Community to be formed according to the Constitution and Kosovo’s laws, but only according to the 2015 agreement in Brussels, which was declared anti-constitutional by Kosovo’s Constitutional Court. “The Serbian List is determined that the Association/Community of Serb municipalities should be formed exclusively in line with the Brussels agreements and will under no circumstance agree for the Association to be denied executive authorizations in certain areas through which it will protect and promote the lives of Serbs in Kosovo and will enable them to remain, survive and return to these areas,” the Serbian List said in a press statement. The European Union meanwhile has welcomed the decision of Kosovo authorities to move forward in the process. “The process of drafting the statute has begun and it will last four months,” said EU spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic.

**EU welcomes drafting of the Statute of the Association (*RTK*)**

Maja Kocijancic, Spokesperson to the EU High Representative, stated that the announcement by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj on giving the mandate to the Management Team to draft the Statute of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo is very welcome. “The drafting process for the Statute has started and will take place within a four-month time frame. This long awaited step allows for the implementation of the Dialogue agreement on the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities to commence, which is an obligation Kosovo undertook in the EU facilitated Dialogue, the Brussels April 2013 and August 2015 agreements. The EU will be inviting the Chief Negotiators from Belgrade and Pristina, their teams, as well as the Management Team and technical experts for discussions in Brussels, to engage constructively and in good faith in the drafting process,” reads the press release.

**Eichhorst: EU welcomes news about draft statute of Association (*media*)**

Angelina Eichhorst, the European External Action Service’s Deputy Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia / Director Western Europe, Western Balkans, Turkey, visited Pristina recently and discussed with political leaders and representatives of civil society Kosovo’s European integration agenda after the adoption of the European Commission’s new Strategy for the Western Balkans. Eichhorst said the Commission’s new report on Kosovo, which will be published on April 17, will include Kosovo’s progress in implementing the Stabilization/Association Agreement and the European reforms agenda and also issues of rule of law, justice, transparency and the fight against organized crime. “Kosovo can expect constructive, effective and fruitful cooperation with the European Union and the region,” she said. Eichhorst talked about the importance of ratifying the border demarcation with Montenegro as a long-awaited and important step toward visa liberalization. She put special emphasis on the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and the recent events in Mitrovica North. She said any dispute between Belgrade and Pristina must be addressed and resolved peacefully and through dialogue. “Kosovo must implement the agreement on the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities without further delay,” she said. Eichhorst also welcomed Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj’s announcement about the start of work of the managerial team. “We will now invite the chief negotiators from Belgrade and Pristina, their respective teams and the managerial team to hold talks in Brussels and to engage constructively in the process of drafting the statute of the Association,” Eichhorst added.

**Serbian List: Association in accordance with Brussels negotiations (*RTK*)**

The Serbian List requests for the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities to be exclusively in accordance with the agreements reached in Brussels. This political party announced on Thursday that they would not agree with any condition or justification that would abolish basic elements which guarantee its functionality and executive powers in certain fields, which defend and improve lives of Serbs in Kosovo.

**Djuric: Pristina wants a powerless Association (*Tanjug/RTK*)**

The Director of the Office for Kosovo at Serbian government, Marko Djuric, said he is not optimistic with regard to the deadline set by Brussels on establishment of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities. He said Serbia will support establishment of this Association, but not based on the Constitution of Kosovo, which found 23 violations. “We want the Association to have power. Pristina wants it without power, but you will not be seeing that movie,” Djuric said. He added further that leaders of Kosovo institutions are not being sincere about the deadline that the EU set for establishment of the Association.

**PDK’s Pajaziti: Government will not fall (*Epoka*)**

Democratic League of Kosovo (PDK) MP, Zenun Pajaziti, said in a front-page interview to the paper that the Kosovo government will not fall as a result of the Serbian List’s decision to leave the ruling coalition. Pajaziti said early parliamentary elections are not in the interest of Kosovo’s state agenda and that none of Kosovo’s Albanian political parties would feel comfortable going to snap elections at this point. “For the time being, our partners would not welcome early elections and I don’t think that elections would offer any solution,” he said. Pajaziti also called on the Serbian List to “reflect on the trust given to them by Kosovo Serbs”.

**LDK with an ultimatum for election date (*RTK*)**

Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) MP, Vjosa Osmani, told Pristina-based ***T7*** broadcaster that the date of extraordinary elections has to be set next week. She said that invitation to the political parties to discuss the election date will be sent during the following days. “Next week we will send a public invitation to all parties, to sit around the table and agree on the election date. If we do not find support, we will immediately proceed with the motion procedure. Any day spent with this governance is harmful for Kosovo,” Osmani said. “We are ready for elections and that is why we are requesting them. This is being done to save the country from a bad governance,” she added.

**LDK assembles heads of branches, prepares for early elections (*Zeri*)**

The paper covers a meeting of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) chairmanship with heads of party branches on Thursday where it was said that Kosovo’s capital issues cannot be addressed by “a government that is falling”. “It is apparent that a minority government cannot govern the country … In the coming days, the LDK chairmanship will visit every branch and intensify preparations for elections,” a press release said.

**Vetevendosje’s Selimi: This government must go (*Zeri*)**

Vetevendosje MP Rexhep Selimi said on Thursday that “the Haradinaj-led government must fall not because of the withdrawal of the Serbian List but due to bad governance”. “I don’t support Serb requests to bring down the government. This is a weak government that is being outplayed,” Selimi was quoted as saying.

**Mathew Palmer to visit Kosovo today (*RTK*)**

Acting Deputy Assistant of the US Secretary of State for European and Euro-Asian Affairs, Mathew Palmer, will be visiting Kosovo on Friday. The Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo announced that Palmer will be meeting PM Haradinaj at 15:00 hours. On Thursday, Palmer visited Belgrade, where he met with Serbia’s President, Aleksandar Vucic. Media reported that they both agreed that normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is of great importance not only for the EU integration process, but also stability of the region and wellbeing and prosperity of the populations of the region.

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