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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**EC Progress Report: Kosovo with limited progress (*media*)**

In its leading front-page article, ***Koha Ditore*** reports on the key findings of the European Commission’s Progress Report on Kosovo. The EC is concerned with the continuing politicization of the public administration, the lack of progress on environmental issues, the unimproved state of the education system, the growing unemployment rate and widespread corruption. The report calls for greater engagement in the fight against money laundering. The report warns about continued threats and attacks against reporters and the challenge that benefits for war veterans pose for public finances. The report expresses concern over threats against Serb candidates that are not members of the Serbian List and also attempts to revoke the special court. The implementation of the justice, according to the report, remains slow and inefficient and the judiciary is still sensitive to unnecessary political interference. The report also notes that “political actors must reengage in constructive dialogue with the Assembly as the key forum for political debate. The new government and assembly must push forward EU-related reforms as priority issues and build consensus on key and strategic issues for Kosovo. The implementation of the Stabilization/Association Agreement and the European Reforms Agenda must be accelerated”. The report also notes urgent progress is needed in the EU-facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, which would result with reaching and implementation of a legally-binding agreement on normalization. “Kosovo should continue to intensify its engagement in the dialogue with Serbia, including implementation of all agreements, especially the Agreement on Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities,” the report says. Pristina-based news website ***Gazeta Express***, which claims to possess a copy of the report, highlights as “a major concern the attempt of 43 members of the Kosovo Assembly to abrogate the Law on Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor’s Office”. “It will be essential for Kosovo to fully comply with its international obligations regarding the Specialist Chambers, which were established to address certain allegations of international crimes committed in the context of the Kosovo conflict,” the report notes. Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, told ***TV Dukagjini*** on Monday that the content of the EC Report on Kosovo is good news and a good assessment for Kosovo. “In regards to visa liberalization there is a positive development after the ratification of border demarcation with Montenegro, as well as the progress Kosovo has made in combating organized crime and corruption. In the report these two aspects are assessed with a positive note,” Hoxhaj said. He also said he believes that the European Commission may come up with a final recommendation on visa liberalisation for Kosovo. Halil Matoshi, advisor to Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, told ***Radio Free Europe*** that the government expects this year’s Progress Report to be more positive than the previous one. Matoshi said a lot of work remains to be done, especially in strengthening the rule of law.

**EC to confirm in June if visa liberalization criteria are met (*Koha*)**

Sources in the European Commission told the paper that this institution is assessing the implementation of visa liberalization requirements by Kosovo’s authorities. “The Commission will continue to closely monitor the progress in the fight against organized crime and corruption and will inform the Parliament and the Council on the progress,” sources said. They also said that a technical mission of the European Commission will soon visit Kosovo and if everything goes as planned and if it is proven that Kosovo has made satisfactory results, the Commission might confirm fulfilment of all criteria in June.

**Borissov: Kosovo and Serbia cannot join EU without settlement (*dailies*)**

The media cover yesterday’s visit of Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Boyko Borissov, to Kosovo and quote him as saying that Kosovo and Serbia cannot aspire to become part of the European Union without first reaching a settlement. “The EU does not want to have your historic problems transferred to it so it is your duty to find a compromise on how to move forwards,” Borissov said at a joint press conference with President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci. Borissov also said that President Thaci has been invited to attend the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia. “Kosovo will be represented the way it has been recognized by over 100 world countries. Whereas as far as countries that haven’t recognized it are concerned, we will find a solution,” he said. ***Telegrafi*** reports that Thaci told a joint press conference after the meeting that Kosovo has met all the visa liberalization requirements. “After the Assembly adopted the border demarcation this issue has been closed. I see things moving in the right direction, the decision is in the hands of EU authorities … Visa liberalization should happen this year,” Thaci is quoted as saying. ***Lajmi*** meanwhile quotes Thaci as saying that Kosovo does not mind the relations between Russia and Serbia, but that by recognizing Kosovo’s independence, Russia would help Serbia too. He also said that Kosovo “shares the position of the European Union and the United States of America as far as sanctions are concerned”. Bulgarian Prime Minister also met yesterday Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj. Haradinaj said Bulgaria plays a significant role in the region and that Kosovo is committed to ensuring close relations with it. “Bulgaria has an ally, Kosovo,” Haradinaj said.

**Assembly session continues today (*Koha*)**

The news website reports that the assembly works will continue today with the agenda that was planned yesterday. As the agenda is currently planned, MPs will review the system operator’s report of the transmission and market – KOSST; select the candidates for the judges of the Constitutional Court; Review the proposal of the Government to appoint 6 members of the Kosovo Agency of Privatization Board; select the Agency director for managing the memorial complexes in Kosovo. It is also planned that the MPs will select three candidates for the Independent Media Commissions; the formation of the commission to select two candidates for the Independent media Commission and discuss the motion against the Prime Minister put forward by Vetevendosje.

**MePs concerned over deportation of Turkish nationals (*RTK*)**

Members of European Parliament have sent a letter to Kosovo authorities and expressed serious concern over the case of six Turkish Nationals, who were detained in Kosovo and deported to Turkey, RTK reports. The European Parliament rapporteur for Kosovo, Igor Soltes, together with MEP Rebeka Harms sent the letter to President Hashim Thaci and PM Ramush Haradinaj, signed by 28 MEPs across political groups to express their serious concern. “We strongly criticize that the residence permits of the six Turkish citizens were annulled without any legal procedure, and the deportation was done without any trial. Kosovo as a part of the EU accession process, should align with EU standards. The rule of law is a fundamental principle of the EU,” Soltes wrote on Twitter. “We urge Kosovo authorities, President Thaci and PM Haradinaj to fully respect all judicial procedures in line with the EU principles. Arbitrary procedures concerning arrest, detention or extradition are in violation of these principles.” Last month, Kosovo authorities arrested six Turkish nationals linked to schools financed by Gulen’s movement and extradited them to Turkey, prompting Kosovo’s prime minister to dismiss his interior minister and secret service chief. Kosovo’s parliament also voted to investigate the arrests, RTK reports.

**Assembly fails to establish commission for expelled Turkish nationals (*Epoka*)**

The Assembly of Kosovo did not manage to include in the agenda the proposal of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) parliamentary group to set up an investigation committee into the expulsion of six Turkish nationals, due to the lack of quorum for this proposal. “We have repeated the voting three times. Only 59 MPs voted,” said Xhavit Haliti, who presided the session. 67 MPs were present at the Assembly at the time of voting.

**Serbian List ultimatum to run out in three days (*Zeri*)**

The paper reports on the front page that the Serbian List’s ultimatum to Kosovo institutions regarding the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities is set to expire April 20 but the party officials did not comment on whether they plan to unilaterally establish it as they threatened to do. At the same time, Kosovo government officials say unilateral establishment would be unacceptable and add that the Association/Community will be formed in few months’ time. Avni Arifi, Kosovo’s chief negotiator, said: “We believe the formalization of the Association in conformity to the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo is a matter of months.”

**Serbs want executive powers for Association/Community (*Zeri*)**

Serbian List leader, Goran Rakic, said that Serbia and Serbs in the north of Kosovo would not accept anything short of an Association/Community with executive powers. The same view has was also been echoed by the head of the Serbian Government’s Office for Kosovo, Marko Djuric, who said Serbia would not agree to an association that would resemble an NGO. Meanwhile, the paper warns that as the ultimatum of the Serbian List regarding the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities is about to run out, the risk of half of Trepca mines and the waterworks company Iber-Lepenci remaining under the control of Belgrade increases.

**NATO against Association with executive competencies (*RTK*)**

NATO officials have objected the possibility for the Association of the Serb-majority Municipalities to have executive competencies. Media in Belgrade quoted sources within NATO, as saying that Association should not be a parallel power in Kosovo. The same position was also supported by the European Union. Furthermore, the Association should not be repetition of parallel structures, being that Kosovo government is in Pristina. According to the Serbian news agency ***Beta***, sources within NATO also said that Association should not establish as a non-governmental organization, and it should defend Serb interests. According to the same sources, NATO position is that Belgrade and Pristina should sit again around the table and find a final solution for the main part of Brussels Agreement, which is establishment of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities.

**DPM Hoxhaj accuses Serbian media of fuelling tensions in Kosovo (*Bota Sot*)**

Kosovo Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, has reacted to reports by certain Serbian media that Kosovo Police was preparing a possible intervention in the north of Kosovo saying Serbian media are manipulating the public with fake news and that these are aimed at destabilizing Kosovo.

**Pacolli: KSF will soon become an army (*RTK*)**

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Behgjet Pacolli said on Monday that the Kosovo Army will be created very soon. Pacolli posted a picture with two Kosovo Security Force members on Facebook and wrote “There are not many who talk about them, but they deserve all the respect. I am speaking about KSF members behind me, who will soon become an army”.

**Two MPs threaten to leave ruling coalition citing discrimination (*RTK/Telegrafi*)**

MPs from the Egyptian Liberal Party and the Ashkali Party for Integration, Veton Berisha and Etem Arifi, have threatened they would leave the ruling alleging citing discrimination by the recently announced job vacancies with the Kosovo Police. MPs said the Kosovo Police and the Interior Ministry have excluded members of the Egyptian and Ashkali communities from the hiring process as the application form does not enable them to state their ethnicity. They have given the Kosovo Police 24 hours to correct the announcement. Meanwhile, ***Telegrafi*** quotes a statement issued by the Kosovo Police saying it is committed to ensuring equal treatment of all communities and that the application form in question contains a “technical error”. “We assure you immediate measures will be taken to correct technical errors,” the police said.

**Istog mayor Haki Rugova indicted (*Koha*)**

The Basic Prosecution Office in Gjakova filed an indictment against the mayor of Istog Haki Rugova, media report. He is accused of conflict of interest by giving a tender to his brother, Gani Rugova, worth about 300,000 Euros, Koha.net reports. The indictment says that Haki Rugova, on 1 August 2014 has signed a contract with "Ma-Con" company for the construction of sewerage for the villages of Cerce and Lubozhde. According to the indictment, at the time when the contract between the Municipality of Istog and the company "Ma-Con" was signed, the director of the company was Gani Rugova and the contract price was 289,119 Euros. The Basic Prosecution Office says that through these actions, the accused Rugova has enabled his brother, Gani Rugova, financial interest, and therefore accuses him of having committed the criminal offense of conflict of interest.

**Rikalo sends millions to the north (*Koha*)**

The paper reports in one of its front-page stories that the Serbian List is sending millions of euros from the state budget to the northern part of the country, despite the fact that it has formally withdrawn from the ruling coalition. The Ministry of Agriculture announced last week a call for application to a special support program dedicated to the mainly Serb-inhabited Mitrovica North region. The Ministry of Agriculture is led by Nena Rikalo, and although him and his colleagues Dalibor Jevtic and Ivan Todosijevic have said they have left the government, all three are still running the ministry until the appointment of new ministers. Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj meanwhile is tolerating this situation by not appointing the new ministers.

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